

UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education

2023 Report

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



The University of Newcastle is proud to host the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education. The Chair builds on the internationally recognised framework of the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education, and the strong history of supporting equity at the University of Newcastle. The award of the Chair has provided an exciting opportunity to expand key equity projects, and collaborate with colleagues in Ghana and around the world.

At the commencement of the year, we were pleased to bring together our community, including the Federal Member for Newcastle Ms Sharon Claydon MP to celebrate the announcement of the Chair. It has been inspiring to see the progress made on the key projects of the UNESCO Chair over the course of 2023.

It was wonderful to welcome three new PhD Scholars, supported by our Research and Innovation Division, to Newcastle. These students are undertaking important projects that will contribute to overcoming challenges of inequality globally and within their specific regional contexts, in Peru, Ghana and Australia. Through the support of the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Global Engagement and Partnerships we welcomed visiting scholar and key UNESCO Partner, Dr Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera.

The insights gained from engagement with the UNESCO teams in Paris and Bangkok and via the UNESCO Chair/UNITWIN networks have informed the University of Newcastle's approach and activity on working towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This is reflected in our University ranking within the Top 30 in the world for impact, according to the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2023.

We look forward to continuing to support the international engagement, research and on-the-ground impact of the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education.

Professor Alex Zelinsky AO
Vice-Chancellor and President, the University of Newcastle



“Through the UNESCO Chair, we will collaboratively generate new knowledge and practice that has the power to address the ongoing inequalities that impede fair, equitable and sustainable futures for all.”

It has been an honour and a privilege to take up the role of UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education at the University of Newcastle, Australia – a role I take very seriously in its potential to mobilise higher education as a force for transformative equity and social justice. I am deeply committed to advancing UNESCO’s call for higher education to address the urgent issues of our times. It is my strong position that our sustainable futures demand that we challenge systems of exclusion to ensure the parity of participation of communities regularly excluded from generating the strategies required for social, planetary, cultural and personal well-being. Higher education is central to this.

Over 2023, we have developed a collaborative UNESCO Chair team, with local, regional and international partnerships, building on the work of the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE). We have put CEEHE’s cutting-edge social justice framework to work in generating programs and projects for transformative equity praxis. We understand that transformation can only come through collective action, through cooperation, collaboration and meaningful parity of participation in the project of change. It is only together that we can build sustainable higher education for equity.

In our first year, a key focus has been our work in the context of the social epidemic of gender-based violence (GBV), a problem of massive proportions that profoundly undermines gender equality and higher education access, participation and equity. We have produced new knowledge with student victim-survivors to understand the extent and nature of GBV among university students. We have created the foundation for extending new knowledge and practice with our community partners to ensure GBV victim-survivors have the necessary resources, supports and opportunities to thrive and flourish. The overarching aim is to sustain research-informed partnership between higher education institutions, community agencies and student victim-survivors to challenge institutions to become forces for change in the fight against GBV and towards gender equality.

Other areas of focus have included collaborative work to Advance Equity in the Sciences, Technologies, Engineering and Mathematics, developing new evaluation frameworks for equity and social justice, generating a new Graduate Certificate in Professional Equity and Inclusion and building capacity of the future leaders for transformative equity praxis in our UNESCO Chair scholars.

The Chair is a collaborative project and I acknowledge the contribution of the UNESCO and CEEHE teams, our participants and partners, and advisors including Pro-Vice Chancellor Nathan Towney, Professor Jennifer Milam, Professor Kathy Luckett and many others.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Penny Jane Burke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Professor Penny Jane Burke,
UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education
Director, Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education**

Reflections from advisory group members

Nathan Towney, Pro-Vice Chancellor Indigenous Strategy and Leadership

Engaging with the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education and other advisory group members has been extremely valuable. Collaborating on and exploring how equity and social justice is understood and addressed in Higher Education has added value to how I address my role in leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, research and engagement. I have specifically worked with the chair on designing a culturally responsive evaluation framework for the New South Wales Department of Education. This work is challenging government to think differently about how they engage with Aboriginal people and centre their voices through evaluation processes. I look forward to continuing this important work.

Professor Jennifer Milam, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Academic Excellence

The UNESCO Chair provides an additional platform for Professor Burke's work to improve gender equity globally through access to higher education. Building on a foundation of research progressed through the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education, the visibility of the UNESCO Chair has brought its program of work to the attention of government and university leaders. This year, Professor Burke's expertise was sought out by the Australian Universities Accord Panel with its focus on improving equity outcomes for all Australians. Globally, she is involved in advising UNITAR on its training programs for university leaders and faculty members to address the UN Sustainable Development Goals through increased equity in higher education. CIFAL Newcastle, also hosted by the University, has a focus on Equity, Indigenous Knowledges, and Transformative Education. Professor Burke's UNESCO Chair amplifies this focus and contributes to research, education, and training around SDG 4 (Quality Education) and 5 (Gender Equity).

About the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education

This report details the progress on key activities and engagements in the first year of the [UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education](#) (2023). 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 (see diagram -right). This framework draws on critical social justice theories and underpins the conceptualisation and design of projects and activities.

The work of the Chair is currently focussed in Australia, Ghana and the United Kingdom, with engagements extending networks globally.



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.

The program of work is organised into three main streams, with researchers, practitioners, community services, students, and policy makers brought together to:

- **Identify intersecting inequalities and combat persistent injustices that impede transformative equity...**

Including through the generation of new knowledge on the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on higher education access and participation and development of specialised post-crisis strategies to support victim-survivors in Australia and Ghana.

- **Develop new research and programmatic strategies for transformative equity, drawing from cutting edge theories and praxis from the field...**

Including through pedagogical research to rethink equity structures in STEM disciplines.

- **Promote redistribution of higher education resources and opportunities to marginalised groups and communities...**

By building international communities of praxis and developing research capacity through courses and RhD scholarships.

An evaluative layer is interwoven across the main streams of work. These cutting-edge evaluative projects are co-developed with the project teams and participants.

The year at a glance

NOVEMBER 2022

The Chair attends 30th anniversary of UNESCO Chair/UNITWIN program

FEBRUARY-MAY 2023

Public lecture & announcement events

First cohort of Graduate Certificate in Professional Equity & Inclusion commences

Community partner events for the Understanding GBV and HE project.

Presentation on SDG 5 to 2024 Australia Award Fellows

JULY-AUGUST 2023

The Chair presents at ANGEL Conference (held at UNESCO HQ)

The Chair participates in meetings with UNESCO HQ and the Deputy Australian Permanent Delegate to UNESCO

The Chair participates in research exchanges & disseminates new work in London, Bath and Bristol

Publication of two articles from the Understanding GBV and HE project

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2023

UNESCO Chair PhD Scholars commence

The Chair delivers presentation on equity and the HDR experience to new HDR students from across UON

Key partner Dr Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera visits Australia to develop collaborative research plans

The Chair delivers Keynotes in Australia and Pakistan

Key insights from the Equity in STEM project distributed to senior leaders and equity committees

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2023

The Chair begins advisory role for UNITAR/ UNESCO Global Sustainability Leaders' Programme on Transforming Higher Education

Equity theory workshop and Understanding GBV and HE presentation delivered at UniSA

The Chair delivers Keynote in Malaysia at Global Higher Education Forum 2023

Presentation to NSW Department of Education on equity and data

Generating new knowledge on the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on higher education access and participation and producing specialised post-crisis strategies to support victim-survivors in Australia and Ghana



The Gender Justice Hub

In response to research conducted with student victim-survivors and in collaboration with community agencies [the team](#) has begun development of a **Gender Justice Hub** (the Hub). The Hub will connect research with policy and practice and promote the role of higher education in addressing the global issue of gender-based violence.

The Hub builds on the research project '[Understanding the impact of gender-based violence on access to and participation in higher education](#)' and will continue to generate new knowledge, through empirical research and collaboration with experts, policy-makers, community services and victim-survivors. The Hub will provide navigational support ([Burke et al. 2021](#)) and pathways for victim-survivors and develop tools with which to challenge resourcing and policy limitations.

Planning has begun for a pilot study in Ghana with UNESCO Chair key partner Dr Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera as the Ghana project lead. This will build on the existing work of the University of Newcastle based project team. A peer-mentorship exchange will further connect the Australian and Ghanaian project teams and partner networks.

2023 Highlights

- Extended analysis of 430 comprehensive survey responses and 48 in-depth interviews with student victim-survivors.
- Art-based workshop series for student victim-survivors (Claim Our Place) and women who have experienced gender-based violence and homelessness (Reclaiming My Place).
- Inter-agency collaboration and partner investigator workshops to explore pathways for higher education and lifelong learning.
- Publication of two journal articles ([Burke et al. 2023](#); [Coffey et al. 2023](#)) and several conference presentations.
- Research meetings with visiting scholar and UNESCO Chair partner Dr Gifty Gyamera to discuss a pilot project for the Ghanaian context and the extension of a peer-mentoring program connected to the project.
- Commencement of a UNESCO Chair PhD Scholar from Ghana who will explore gender-based violence and higher education in the regional context.
- Design of a Relational Navigator role at the University of Newcastle to support student victim-survivor experiences of study.

2024 Directions

In 2024, we will implement the primary infrastructure of the Hub in our region by establishing a student support base and working with specialist community partners to build an evidence base for post-crisis support resourcing. A digital presence for the Hub will be launched and we will work closely with our institution and partners to establish a sustainable pathway for the Hub.

The role of higher education in challenging gender-based violence

Through our research to date we have heard how the university can be both a site of harm and also of transformation. Universities have a responsibility to not only address the issue of gender injustice within their own structures but to consider the role they play in addressing the global issue of GBV, including by generating new research that privileges the knowledge of victim-survivors and through the training of future generations of educators, social workers, healthcare workers, lawyers etc.

We are beginning to see improved recognition of and responses to gender-based violence in higher education (See [Australian Government Action Plan](#) for example). This institutional work is essential and the way in which proposed actions are implemented will be critical. However, the attention of this work remains focused on the instances of GBV occurring on university campuses. Greater recognition of the impact of GBV experiences on access to and participation in higher education, occurring at any stage of life, is still needed.



It is imperative that higher education equity policies and practices engage with the impact of GBV on student experience, inclusion and belonging.

The Chair has challenged institutional leaders and policy-makers to mobilise higher education as a vehicle for addressing gender-based violence through keynote presentations in Australia, Malaysia (*pictured - left*), Pakistan and the United Kingdom.

Co-developing the research in Ghana

Dr Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera travelled to Australia in October 2023 for intensive research time, building the Ghana-based programs of the UNESCO Chair. Dr Gyamera worked alongside the Newcastle project team (*team pictured together - above*) to design the pilot study and develop the framework for a peer-exchange between the project teams and partner networks. Dr Gyamera [presented](#) on gender-based violence and higher education in the Ghanaian context to the University community, including Senior Executives.



The visit was supported with funding from the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Global Engagement and Partnerships, at the University of Newcastle.



Partnership with frontline community sector services

The work of the Hub directly responds to the identified needs of community services in our region. Through a series of partner workshops (*Dr Hardacre outlines the quantitative data from the study - left*) we have heard first hand the resourcing challenges facing the sector, including the gaps in post-crisis service delivery. In 2024, we will commence a collaborative mapping project comprising workshops, interviews and a survey with domestic and family violence service leaders and a mixed-methods survey with sector staff. This multi-staged project will produce an evidence base to support sector advocacy with the aim of driving policy change.

Supporting student-victim survivors and understanding how future graduates are taught about gender-based violence

The invisibility of GBV in higher education makes it particularly difficult for student victim-survivors to raise the complex inequalities they are navigating alongside their studies. In 2024, we will launch a relational navigator role. The Navigator will walk alongside student victim-survivors as they navigate university processes and coursework. This model builds on existing programs within the CEEHE. Through the development of a framework and evaluative process we aim to share this approach for implementation within other institutions.

Pedagogical research to rethink equity structures in STEM disciplines



Facilitating a research-informed framework for equity in Sciences, Technologies, Engineering and Mathematics

[This project](#) aims to build better understanding of the challenges, dilemmas and opportunities of equity policies and practices in the diverse contexts of several STEM disciplines. The project draws on pedagogical methodologies ([Burke and Lumb, 2018](#); Burke and Lumb, 2024) with the aim to feed the research insights directly into professional development workshops.

The project shows that there are different and contested perspectives of equity, related to identity, experience and institutional position. Many respondents highlight the effort involved with convincing peers and colleagues that equity work is relevant and important. This is exacerbated when workloads are intensified and when equity policies and institutional responsibilities are not resourced adequately. Responses show how the labour of undertaking equity work is often devalued and individualised in a hierarchical and competitive academic context. Tensions between working to build equity and being recognised as an academic were regularly expressed.

International collaboration, including with Bath University in the United Kingdom, supports the development of globally minded strategies to address the intersecting gender disparities still present in STEM disciplines. Research exchanges, including through visits by the Chair and research team members, have strengthened the research design in both sites and will support the impact of these challenging insights.

Those who carry most responsibility also are most affected by the lack of equity, and are active across the College and the University. Their contributions to promoting equity leave less time to contribute to other areas of academic activity (e.g., teaching and research) (academic participant in the qualitative survey)

2023 Highlights

- Collection and analysis of 241 survey responses (41 staff and 200 students) and 51 interviews (27 staff and 24 students).
- Research meetings with colleagues at the University of Bath during visit to the UK by the Chair (July) and Dr Matt Lumb and Dr Matthew Bunn (December).
- Insights from the project were disseminated via meetings with the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee structure and to senior leadership at the University of Newcastle.

2024 Directions

In 2024, professional and academic staff will have opportunities to discuss and critically reflect on key challenges identified in the research and to collaboratively translate this into action.

Building international communities of praxis and developing research capacity through courses and RhD scholarships.



UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education Scholars

A key element of the UNESCO Chair is its ongoing commitment to building research capacity via communities of praxis and the redistribution of resources. Through the UNESCO Chair we were able to offer 3 fully funded PhD scholarships with the support of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation and the Office of Graduate Studies. The Scholars have now begun their studies at the University of Newcastle.

Meet the UNESCO Scholars

Shay Greig (Australia) (*above-right*) will explore class struggle, gender, and power within the higher education experiences and outcomes for working class students in the Illawarra, working with Professor Penny Jane Burke and Dr Matthew Bunn; **Luz Gamarra Caballero** (Peru) (*above-left*) will examine Indigenous women's success in higher education in both Australia and Peru, working with Professor Burke, Professor Kathleen Butler and Associate Professor Julia Coffey; and **Ernestina Mambono Nyaaba** (Ghana) (*above-centre*) will build understandings of the impact of gender-based violence on higher education access in Ghana, working with Professor Burke and A/Professor Coffey.

“As a women and girls activist who is so passionate about their well-being, I will explore the impeding factors of GBV to their participation in higher education and the ways it could be mitigated to create a smoother path towards their attainment of higher education” (Ernestina Mambono Nyaaba)



Graduate Certificate in Professional Equity and Inclusion

CEEHE has an important role in building capacity for critical praxis in the Australian equity sector. In 2023, we launched a [Graduate Certificate for Professional Equity and Inclusion](#) (GCPEI) in collaboration with the School of Humanities, Creative Industries and Social Sciences. The GCPEI provides tools for critical thinking about the importance of equitable institutions and organisations. The program has begun successfully, having doubled the intake of students across the first 12 months. The program will look to expand to incorporate international students, and will be linked to UNITAR CIFAL during 2024. The course is co-delivered by Dr Matthew Bunn (Convenor) (*below-left*), Professor Penny Jane Burke (UNESCO Chair) (*below-centre*), Dr Matt Lumb (*below-right*), Associate Professor Hedda Askland and Associate Professor Daniela Heil.



“The aim of the GCPEI is to challenge the conventional understandings of equity. This is an important step in creatively tackling equity issues, and providing a basis for novel and practical means for building policy, strategy and initiatives.” (Dr Matthew Bunn)

Evaluation for equity

Developing cutting-edge approaches to the evaluation of policies and programs relating to equity and social justice in higher education is a strategic focus of the CEEHE. These approaches include evaluation methodologies that privilege historically subjugated and marginalised knowers and ways of knowing, providing new possibilities for cooperatively designed and developed equity and social justice work. Key programs of the UNESCO Chair are drawing on these approaches, embedding evaluative layers of practice to generate knowledge that is valuable locally and across national and international contexts. The various strands of embedded evaluation will form a network of community-members, program participants, students, scholars and policy-makers supporting the Chair as critical friends/advisors. This work is coordinated by Dr Rhyall Gordon and Dr Matt Lumb.

Outputs and engagement

Engagement with UNESCO and the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chair network

In November, 2022, the Chair attended the 30th Anniversary UNITWIN/UNESCO Chair conference. The Chair has drawn on key presentations from this event to inform the first year of activities and has shared insights via keynote presentations and at key meetings. Connections with UNESCO Chair in Global Citizenship, Masimilliano Tarozzi was re-established at this event and future collaborations are planned – including international scholar exchanges.

In January, the Chair met, via zoom, with Dr Libing Wang to discuss future collaborations between the Bangkok UNESCO Office and the work of the Chair.

In May, The Chair presented on SDG 5 to a cohort of Australia Award Fellows. The event was co-presented by UON CIFAL and the Australia Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In June 2023, The Chair presented at the Academic Network on Global Education & Learning (ANGEL) conference at the Paris UNESCO HQ on 'A Global Pandemic: Understanding the Impact of Gender-based Violence on Higher Education Participation' as part of a session on Education for Global Justice.

The Chair met with the UNESCO Gender Equality and Inclusive Education team, Future of Learning and Innovation team, the UNESCO Director of Gender Equality, Begoña Lasagabaster, as well as the Deputy Permanent Delegate to UNESCO. These meetings have led to further engagement with UNESCO HQ, the UNESCO National Commission and UNESCO Chairs.

Over the course of the year, the Chair has been an active participant in UNESCO Seminars, including:

- Seminar 1: UNESCO's Higher Education Roadmap, Beyond Limits: New Ways to Reinvent Higher Education.
- Seminar 2: Knowledge-driven actions: Transforming higher education for global sustainability, prepared by Independent Expert Group on the Universities and the 2030 Agenda.
- Seminar 3: Reimagining Our Futures Together: A new social contract for education, Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education and Transforming Education: An urgent political imperative for our collective future, Vision Statement of Secretary-General of United Nations.
- Seminar 4: UNESCO Chairs Seminar and OHCHR Hernan Santa Cruz Dialogue A solution in plain sight for a better world: a Human Rights Economy.
- Seminar 8: Reinforcing Higher Education in Africa (The Chair also invited Dr Gifty Oforiwa Gyamera to attend).

Keynote presentations

In April, to celebrate the announcement of the UNESCO Chair, Professor Burke presented a [‘Looking Ahead’ lecture](#) at the University of Newcastle on Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education. A key message of this lecture was the important role for higher education institutions and policy makers in addressing inequalities.



In October, the Chair presented a keynote (virtually) at the ‘Less Talk, More Action: An International Conference on Changing the Course of Women’s Academic Leadership’ in Islamabad, Pakistan. Professor Burke spoke about ‘Changing the Course of Women’s Academic Leadership through Social Justice Praxis’.

In November, the Chair presented a keynote on Equitable Higher Education Recovery: A Roadmap for Higher Education in the Post-Pandemic at the Global Higher Education Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This keynote has led to new collaborations in the Asia Pacific region.

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