

Student Equity in an Era of Change 2025: The Australian Student Equity Symposium

9–10 September 2025
Aerial Function Centre, UTS
+ Live Online

EVENT PROGRAM



Welcome

From our Executive Director

I am delighted to welcome you to Student Equity in an Era of Change 2025, hosted by the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES).

Since the release of the Australian Universities Accord report 18 months ago, the sector has been navigating important and timely reforms. This year alone has seen the establishment of the National Student Ombudsman (NSO), the interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC), and, crucially, the beginnings of a new higher education policy and funding eco-system. These developments represent significant steps forward in strengthening equity, transparency, and student-centred policy across Australian higher education.

This year's Symposium provides a unique platform to reflect on these changes and their impact, as we bring together a diverse group of university leaders, policymakers, researchers, and student representatives to explore innovative solutions and strategies for advancing equity.

Building on last year's success, we are pleased to mark the occasion with the launch of our signature Equity Insights 2025 report at this year's Symposium—a vital resource that features a collection on diverse voices from across the sector to shed new light on student experiences and the reform agenda facing senior management reform in the sector. Additionally, the inaugural ACSES Awards for Innovation and Excellence in Impact on Higher Education Policy and Practice 2025 will be presented at the Opening Night Awards Dinner, celebrating outstanding contributions to student equity and success.

Thank you for joining us on this important journey to make higher education more accessible and supportive for all students. I hope very much that you enjoy and are truly stimulated by discussions at this year's Symposium.



Professor Shamit Saggar CBE FAcSS

Executive Director

Australian Centre for Student Equity Success



Welcome

From our Research and Policy Program Director

I am pleased to welcome everyone to the ACSES Policy Symposium 2025: Student Equity in an Era of Change. The higher education landscape has changed significantly in recent years, with tectonic shifts such as the Australian Universities Accord, the advent of Generative AI, and policy changes in the international student sector. In the midst of all these changes, student equity and outcomes must remain at the heart of the sector.



I am looking forward to the robust discussions and partnerships that will be taking place over the course of our two-day Symposium. This year, we once again have a fantastic line-up of speakers across Australia and internationally. We will also hear from our most important stakeholder—students—who will share with us their perspective on how to achieve success for all students. It is truly valuable to have the student perspective and co-design with us on this journey to better student equity and outcomes.

As always, I express my gratitude to all speakers, participants, and supporters. The Symposium is enriched by your contributions. Higher education is increasingly complex, and we will rely on the partnerships and contributions of all to make student success a reality.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Li'.

Professor Ian Li SFHEA

Research and Policy Program Director
Australian Centre for Student Equity Success



Welcome Reception

8 September | 5:30pm–7:30pm

Mercure Sydney

Shop 1/820 George St, Sydney NSW 2000

Level 2, Town Hall Suite

Symposium Day One

9 September | 9:00am–4:15pm

Aerial Function Centre, UTS

Jones St, Ultimo NSW 2007

Building 10, Level 7

ACSES Symposium Dinner and Awards

9 September | 6:30pm–9:30pm

Aerial Function Centre, UTS

Jones St, Ultimo NSW 2007

Building 10, Level 7

Symposium Day Two

10 September | 8:30am–4:45pm

Aerial Function Centre, UTS

Jones St, Ultimo NSW 2007

Building 10, Level 7



DAY ONE

9:00am - 9:20am	Registration with tea/coffee available
9:20am - 9:30am	Welcome to Country (Uncle Michael West)
9:30am - 9:40am	Welcome from UTS (Professor Kylie Readman)
9:40am - 9:55am	Opening Remarks (Professor Shamit Saggar CBE FAcSS, Professor Ian Li SFHEA)
10:00am - 11:30am	Panel 1: Success from the Perspectives of Students Moderator: Dr Nicola Cull Panellists: Em Bagg, Kayla Barker-Peris, Eunice Cheng, Samuel North, and Lachlan Sibir
11:30am - 12:00pm	Keynote Address and Q&A Session by the Hon. Jason Clare, Minister for Education Moderator: Professor Harlene Hayne CNZM
12:00pm - 1:00pm	LUNCH
1:00pm - 2:30pm	Panel 2: What Works for Regional Student Outcomes? Moderator: The Hon. Fiona Nash Panellists: Dr Kylie Austin, Timothy Connolly, Professor Chris Moran, Natalie Nelmes, and Alec Webb
2:30pm - 3:00pm	AFTERNOON TEA
3:00pm - 4:15pm	Panel 3: Financing the Future – Innovation and Equity in Higher Education Funding Moderator: Dr Catherine de Fontenay Panellists: Associate Professor Gwilym Croucher, Professor Andrew Norton, Penny Szybiak, and Mark Warburton
6:30pm - 9:30pm	ACSES Symposium Dinner and Awards Keynote speaker: Professor the Hon. Verity Firth AM Award Presenters: Professor Leanne Holt, Kathleen Nelly, and Professor Paul Harpur OAM



ACSES Symposium Dinner and Awards

The Awards for Innovation and Excellence in Impact on Higher Education Policy and Practice recognise individuals or teams that have made significant contributions to shaping policy and transforming practices in ways that drive positive outcomes in higher education student equity.

These awards celebrate those whose work has not only influenced decision-makers, but have also led to tangible improvements in higher education outcomes for students from equity backgrounds.

Recipients of this award have demonstrated a profound ability to bridge research, advocacy, and practical application, ensuring that their efforts result in sustainable, real-world outcomes in higher education equity.

Three winners have been selected based off of the following criteria:

- Impact and Effectiveness
- Evidence and Research-Based Approaches
- Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

9 September | 6:30pm–9:30pm

Aerial Function Centre, UTS
Jones St, Ultimo NSW 2007
Building 10, Level 7



Keynote Speaker

Professor the Hon. Verity Firth AM
Vice-President Societal Impact,
Equity and Engagement, UNSW



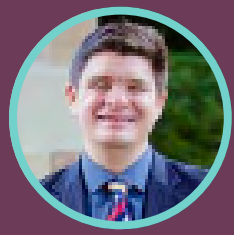
Awards Presenter

Professor Leanne Holt
Advisory Board Member, ACSES



Awards Presenter

Kathleen Nelly
Advisory Board Member, ACSES



Awards Presenter

Professor Paul Harpur OAM
Advisory Board Member, ACSES



DAY TWO

8:30am - 9:00am	Registration with tea/coffee available
9:00am - 9:15am	Overview of Day (Professor Ian Li SFHEA)
9:15am - 9:45am	Keynote Address (recorded) by Senator the Hon. Jonathon Duniam, Shadow Minister for Education
9:45am - 10:45am	The Georgia State Model: Using AI and Analytics to Transform Outcomes for Underserved Students Keynote speaker: Dr Timothy Renick (via livestream) Chair: Professor Shamit Saggar CBE FAcSS Panellists: Professor Shaun Ewen, Sonal Singh, Dr Nadine Zacharias
11:00am - 12:15pm	Panel 4: Alternate Pathways into University Moderator: Sonal Singh Panellists: Jenny Dodd, Professor Barney Glover AO, Professor Alpha Possamai-Inesedy, and Karen Seary
12:15pm - 1:15pm	LUNCH
1:15pm - 2:30pm	Panel 5: Getting it Right – Equity, Policy, and Data Moderator: Associate Professor Gemma Cadby Panellists: Dr Angela Baker, Geoffrey Mitchell, Dr Fiona Navin, and Kristy Naylor
2:30pm - 3:00pm	AFTERNOON TEA
3:00pm - 4:15pm	Panel 6: Reimagining Equity in Higher Education Moderator: Distinguished Professor George Williams AO Panellists: Sarah Bendall, Dr Matt Brett, Dylan Storer, Dr Patricia Vermillion Peirce CE, and Dr Tracy Woodroffe
4:15pm - 4:30pm	Closing Address by Luke Sheehy
4:30pm - 4:45pm	Event Wrap Up (Professor Ian Li SFHEA and Eunice Cheng)



The Speakers



Dr Kylie Austin

Kylie has over seventeen years' experience in the higher education sector in leadership and student experience focused roles. Kylie holds qualifications in Education, Mental Health in Education Settings and research qualifications in collaborative partnerships, equity and student success in higher education settings. In addition to her role as the current Director, Student Life at Edith Cowan University, Kylie is also the current President of Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia and is engaged in a number of national research projects and collaborative networks focused on the student experience and student equity. In addition to this, Kylie has led large teams and is passionate about supporting teams to establish person-centred and collaborative cultures.



Em Bagg

Em Bagg is a final year PhD candidate at Deakin University. She holds a Bachelor of Arts (First Class Honours) from the University of Notre Dame Australia and a Master of Social Policy (First Class Honours) from The University of Melbourne. Her interest in more equitable university policy stems from her time as President of the Notre Dame Student Association and continued in fellowship at the Danish School of Education. She draws on her lived experience and intersectional, transdisciplinary approaches to trouble academic, social and political assumptions about existing in abnormative ways in the context of systemic injustice. She aims to find ways to embed more complex storytelling into conceptualising and operationalising university equity policy.





Dr Angela Baker

Dr. Angela Baker is Director, Education Sector at the Social Research Centre, with over 20 years' experience in market, social, and government research. She has led major quantitative and mixed-methods projects across agencies and corporates, specialising in customer insights and analytics. Angela focuses on helping educational institutions improve student outcomes through data-driven strategy. She has worked with universities to develop ongoing student experience trackers, measuring satisfaction, advocacy, and support services. In her current role at the Social Research Centre, she builds strong relationships with the higher education sector and promotes the strategic use of QILT data to support student success.



Kayla Barker-Peris

Kayla Baker-Peris is a proud Yolngu, Yawurru, and Kidja woman and a full-time student at the University of Technology Sydney, studying a double degree in Communications and International Studies. A strong advocate for social justice and cultural identity, Kayla believes education plays a critical role in advancing equality.

Through her leadership, mentorship, and lived experience, Kayla works to amplify Indigenous voices and create spaces where young Indigenous people feel seen, respected, and valued. Her commitment to equity continues to shape her path as a student and emerging change maker.





Sarah Bendall

Sarah Bendall joined the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman as First Assistant Ombudsman, National Student Ombudsman (NSO) in September 2024, and leads the NSO function. A qualified lawyer, Sarah has worked in and around external oversight agencies for more than 25 years and is passionate about supporting individuals to resolve disputes and organisations to continually improve their systems and services. Prior to joining the NSO, Sarah was Victoria's Chief Dispute Resolution Officer, a statutory position responsible for leading state-wide dispute resolution services for domestic building and consumer and community disputes. Sarah's other roles have included General Counsel at Victoria Legal Aid and Head of Legal and Dispute Resolution at the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.



Dr Matt Brett

Matt Brett PhD is Director of Academic Governance and Standards at Deakin University, where he leads higher education standards compliance, academic governance and policy, course governance, student evaluations, and quality assurance. Matt has recently taken on a role with ACSES as Project Director for the Disability Support Program Capacity Building Fund Project.





Associate Professor Gemma Cadby

Gemma is Director of the Data Program at the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES), where she leads the development and delivery of the Interactive Data Tool and Data Insights Series - key resources that support higher education stakeholders in shaping equity strategies. Her work focuses on improving the accessibility, accuracy, and usability of equity data across the sector to enable informed, evidence-based decision-making. Gemma brings extensive experience in genetic epidemiology and data linkage from her previous roles at the University of Western Australia and the WA Department of Health.



Eunice Cheng

Eunice is a sixth-year Medicine student at UNSW Sydney. With lived experience across multiple equity backgrounds, she advocates for equitable access to higher education, student wellbeing, and inclusive communities. She holds leadership roles including Chair of the UNSW Student Health Advisory Committee, Senior Ambassador for the Student Equity team, and member of several student consultative groups. In 2024, Eunice received the UNSW Rising Voices in Higher Education Award and the UNSW Culture 'Unsung Hero' Award for her work supporting peers. She was also selected to speak at the Student Success Conference, where she highlighted the importance of diverse student voices in shaping the future of higher education.





The Hon. Jason Clare

Jason is the Minister for Education and has represented the Blaxland electorate of Western Sydney since 2007. He has previously served as a Minister in the Rudd and Gillard Labor Governments, where he was Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice, Minister for Defence Materiel and Cabinet Secretary.

Before entering Parliament, Jason was the Manager of Corporate Relations at Transurban and a Senior Adviser to the Premier of NSW, the Hon. Bob Carr. He has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and a Bachelor of Laws from the University of NSW. Jason's most important job is being Louise's husband and Atticus and Jack's dad.



Associate Professor Gwilym Croucher

Associate Professor Gwilym Croucher is higher education analyst and researcher and Deputy Director of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne. A former Fulbright Scholar, his work focuses on the political economy of higher education, as well as on higher education policy and management. He has led major research projects and consultancies on different aspects of Australian higher education public policy financing, and international education, as well as authoring histories of higher education.





Dr Nicola Cull

Dr Nicola Cull is the Associate Director of Equity and Inclusion at the Australian Catholic University and the Incoming President of Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Association (EPHEA). She leads ACU's Equity and Inclusion Unit and plays a key role in driving the University's Widening Participation Strategy. Nicola has extensive experience in equity strategy, program design, evaluation, and research, including cross-institutional projects. Her work is informed by an interest in the interplay between structures and agency, particularly within higher education. She was awarded the Elizabeth Mary Dodd Prize in Education for her master's research on inclusive education and has completed a PhD with the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, focusing on equity in higher education



Timothy Denis Connolly

Timothy studied through Taree Universities Campus to complete his Masters in Social Change and Development from The University of Newcastle. He also holds a Bachelor of Economics (Hons) plus relevant TAFE/Community College certificates. Timothy's working life includes the manufacturing, agricultural, retail, finance and public service arenas and he has lived experience of a medical condition.





Jenny Dodd

Jenny Dodd is Chief Executive TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) and leads TAFE positioning in tertiary education. TDA members consist of all TAFEs and dual sector universities with TAFE divisions. Prior to leading TDA Jenny was CEO of TasTAFE in Tasmania (2018-2020), Chief Academic Officer and General Manager Gold Coast for TAFE Queensland (2014-2017), and Deputy CEO Education, Marketing and National Positioning for the Canberra Institute of Technology (2007-2013). Among her other representative roles, Jenny currently is a member of the Implementation Advisory Committee for the Universities Accord and a part of the National Aged Care Advisory Committee. Jenny has qualifications in commerce, human resource management, education, and training and assessment.



Senator the Hon. Jonathon Duniam

Jonathon Duniam was elected to the Senate in 2016 and is currently the Federal Shadow Minister for Education and Early Learning. As a proud sixth-generation Tasmanian with an especially strong family heritage in the north west of the state, he hopes to see more young Tasmanians stay in the state and build their education, careers, and successful stories locally. Throughout his career, Jonathon has worked in public service positions and has been close to the policymaking process, including as the Deputy Chief of Staff to past Tasmanian Premier, Will Hodgman. In relation to education, he is passionate about improving opportunities and outcomes for both educators and students – and working with stakeholders across the sector to help lift standards and results across the country.





Professor Shaun Ewen

Professor Shaun Ewen was appointed Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) at Griffith University in January 2022. He previously held roles as Pro Vice-Chancellor (Place and Indigenous) and Foundation Director of the Melbourne Poche Centre for Indigenous Health at the University of Melbourne, and was a visiting Professor at King's College London in 2020. He holds degrees in Applied Science (Physiotherapy), International Studies, and a Doctorate of Education. His research focuses on Indigenous health workforce development and health professional education. Shaun is a Member of the Australasian Strategic Advisory Board for Advance HE and is committed to diversity and inclusion in higher education. Under his leadership, Griffith has seen a nearly five percent increase in student retention, driven by the EmpowerED program, curriculum innovation, expanded financial support, and targeted equity initiatives.



Professor the Hon. Verity Firth AM

Professor Verity Firth AM is the inaugural Vice-President Societal Impact, Equity and Engagement at the University of New South Wales. Prof. Firth has over twenty years' experience at the very highest levels of government and education sectors in Australia. Prior to her role at UNSW, Prof. Firth was the Pro Vice-Chancellor Social Justice and Inclusion at UTS (2015-2022), the CEO of the Public Education Foundation (2011-2014) and the NSW Minister for Education and Training (2008-2011). Verity is a member of the Commonwealth Government's Implementation Advisory Committee for the Universities Accord.





Dr Catherine de Fontenay

Dr. Catherine de Fontenay has been a Commissioner of the Productivity Commission since 2019. Prior to that, she was an Associate Professor of Economics at Melbourne Business School, University of Melbourne. She received her PhD from Stanford University in 1998, and she has held visiting positions at the Stern School of Business, New York University, and the Stanford Institute for Economic and Policy Research.

At the PC, she led the research on Higher Education in the 2023 Productivity Inquiry, and she is currently one of the Commissioners on the inquiry into A Skilled and Adaptable Workforce.



Professor Barney Glover AO

Professor Barney Glover AO is Commissioner of Jobs and Skills Australia and an experienced university leader. He was Vice-Chancellor of Western Sydney University (2014–2024) and previously led Charles Darwin University. An accomplished mathematician and STEM advocate, Professor Glover is known for his work strengthening partnerships between higher education and the vocational education and training sector. He has been recognised for his leadership with numerous honorary titles and national awards, including Officer of the Order of Australia in 2019. He has served on the boards of state and national research, innovation and workforce organisations.





Professor Paul Harpur OAM

Professor Paul Harpur OAM is a Professor with the TC Beirne School of Law, at the University of Queensland. He is employed on a 4-year ARC Future Fellowship supporting universities to become disability champions of change. He is an Associate with the Harvard Law School Project on Disability, chairs Universities Enable – a sector-wide disability steering-group, and is an ambassador for the Australian Human Rights Commission Include Ability Network. Beyond academia, Professor Harpur is a dual Paralympian, lawyer, 2022 Blind Australian of the Year, and in the 2024 Australia Day Honours, Professor Harpur was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia “for service to people with disability.”



Professor Harlene Hayne CNZM

Professor Hayne is Vice-Chancellor of Curtin University, prior to this she was the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Otago. Professor Hayne received a BA from Colorado College, a Master of Science and PhD in Behavioural Neuroscience from Rutgers University, and spent three years as a post-doctoral fellow at Princeton before joining the University of Otago in 1992. She conducts research in the areas of memory development and adolescent risk taking. In 2022 she was made a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM), in recognition of her services to health and wellbeing.





Professor Leanne Holt

Professor Holt, a Worimi/Biripi woman, is Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous at UNSW. With over 25 years experience in higher education, she was previously PVC Indigenous Strategy, Macquarie University and prior to this co-Director of the Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle. Professor Holt's educational and research interests are in leadership and Indigenous education and health policy. She is a member of professional national and international Indigenous education committees and expert panels, as well as Chair and Director for local Indigenous community not-for-profit boards. She has shared her experience and expertise Chairing external reviews of Indigenous programs and services at universities nationally and internationally. Professor Holt is the author of the book 'Talking Strong' and has been recognised for her leadership in Indigenous higher education and community contributions, receiving national and international awards.



Professor Ian Li SFHEA

Professor Ian Li is Director of the Research and Policy program at the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success. He is an economist specialising in applied health and labour economics. Ian has significant leadership experience at institutional and national levels, is an award-winning teacher and accomplished research leader. His work has influenced government policy, and he has consulted for government and industry.

Ian is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and Research Fellow at the IZA Labor Institute, University of Bonn. He has held visiting appointments at Harvard University, Swansea University and the University of Melbourne. He is a regular media commentator and speaker for (inter)national events.





Geoffrey Mitchell

Geoffrey Mitchell is the Project Manager for Queensland's Widening Tertiary Participation Consortium and a 2024-25 Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) Visiting Scholar. He has supported a state-wide collaborative approach to pre-access outreach and engagement with First Nations peoples, students in regional and remote locations and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This has included managing Consortium data collections and analysing school and university participation data. He has participated in research projects focused on widening participation impacts and his ACSES Visiting Scholar project has included undertaking a national school and tertiary data mapping exercise and exploring opportunities for further data exploration and collaboration. Prior to working in higher education policy, Geoffrey held education and leadership roles in school and tertiary institutions working extensively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students in regional and remote locations, culturally and linguistically diverse learners and students from low SES backgrounds.



Professor Chris Moran

Professor Moran is Vice-Chancellor and CEO of the University of New England. He joined UNE at a pivotal time for the university, for regional universities and for the sector more broadly. He is an experienced and respected university leader with an academic background in agriculture, natural resources and sustainable development. He brings a commitment to working with staff to support UNE's aspirations in research, education, community engagement and workplace culture.

He is an alumnus of The University of Sydney, spent his early career in CSIRO then went on to the University of Queensland, and was most recently Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research at Curtin University.





The Hon. Fiona Nash

The Hon Fiona Nash grew up in Sydney and has spent the last three decades living and working in regional Australia. For many years she was involved in a family farming enterprise in the central west of NSW, which her sons Will and Henry are now running.

Fiona spent 12 years in the federal parliament as a Senator for NSW and also held ministerial positions including Rural Health, and in Cabinet the positions of Regional Development, Regional Communications and Local Government and Territories. She also held the position of Deputy Leader of the Nationals. From 2018 to 2021 Fiona was the Strategic Adviser, Regional Engagement and Government Relations for Charles Sturt University.

Fiona was appointed by the Australian Government as the Regional Education Commissioner in December 2021.



Dr Fiona Navin

Fiona is Director, Access and Equity, working across the university to embed equitable and inclusive practice to create an environment that is welcoming and facilitates the success of students and staff from a diversity of backgrounds. Fiona's work is grounded in socially just and practical educational initiatives, underpinned by research, evidence and lived experience.





Kristy Naylor

Kristy is the Director of Market Analysis and Data Reform at the Department of Education, responsible for Australia's national higher education statistics collection- a key data asset used across government to shape policy, calculate entitlements, and support decision making. Kristy has extensive experience in government data having spent over 15 years as a statistician at the ABS specializing in population statistics, including First Nations, migration, and demographic statistics.



Kathleen Nelly

Kathleen Nelly is a Yamatji-Noongar woman with ties to the Badimaya and Wirolim peoples, living on Whadjuk land in Boorloo (Perth). She has lived, studied, and worked across WA's mid-west and Pilbara regions. A fourth-year Bachelor of Commerce student at Curtin University, majoring in International Business and Anthropology & Sociology, Kathleen advocates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in education. She is an alumna of the Graham Polly Farmer Foundation and the Yorga Djenna Bidi Leadership Program, and was Geraldton TAFE's inaugural Indigenous Student of the Year. Kathleen works as a Project Officer in Curtin's Cultural Capability team, supporting implementation of the Indigenous Cultural Capabilities Framework. She has contributed to strategy, student equity, and governance, and is a student representative on the ACSES Advisory Board.





Natalie Nelmes

Natalie Nelmes is the Director of Geraldton Universities Centre (GUC) in WA, the first not for profit regional university centre in Australia. Having worked at the coal face of creating this innovative model for supported university education in the regions since 2009, Natalie has gone on to extend assistance to many communities creating their own centres under the Commonwealth's Regional Universities Study Hub (RUSH) program. She was the inaugural Chair of the RUSH Network Advisory Committee and remains a Network Lead. Natalie is the current Secretary of SPERA (Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia) and serves on the Board of a local Geraldton Secondary School. With a Masters in Management, Arts degree and a marketing/PR background, Natalie works with the firm belief that communication and collaboration opens doors to new solutions for tackling community issues.



Samuel North

Samuel is a 3rd year undergraduate chemistry student. He is studying at the University of New South Wales after moving from the regional NSW city, Goulburn, with the help of scholarships from the Country Education Foundation and UNSW. He has been a university ambassador for the Gateway program for 2 years, where he has gotten to connect with students from low-SES backgrounds, helping students realise and achieve their post-High school ambitions. He was the recent recipient of the Barbara Messerle Prize and School Medal for best performance in level 2 chemistry and is pursuing an academic career in synthetic organic chemistry with keen excitement for his upcoming Honours year.





Professor Andrew Norton

Andrew Norton is Professor of Higher Education Policy in the Monash Business School at Monash University. His previous roles include Professor in the Practice of Higher Education Policy at the ANU and Higher Education Program Director at the Grattan Institute.



Professor John Phillimore

John is Executive Director of the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy in addition to being ACSES's Deputy Director. He has worked with ACSES since 2013 where he oversaw the Centre's research grants program, and was Interim Director from August 2022 to July 2023. John has extensive senior level experience in the Western Australian Government, including as Chief of Staff to ministers and as director of intergovernmental relations in the Premier's Department. He has researched and published on Australian public policy, politics, public administration and higher education, and is a regular media commentator on Australian and Western Australian politics and public policy. John has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of WA, a first class honours from Oxford University, and a Masters and PhD from the University of Sussex.





Associate Professor Tim Pitman

Associate Professor Tim Pitman is ACSES's Trials and Evaluation Program Director. Tim is a researcher of higher education policy with a focus on widening access and participation for groups of students historically under-represented in higher education. Tim is a former Senior Researcher and Equity Fellow with ACSES's previous iteration NCSEHE. He has worked in the Australian higher education sector since 1996 and his PhD in Education was completed at The University of Western Australia in 2012



Professor Alpha Possamai-Inesedy

Professor Alpha Possamai-Inesedy, Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Success at Western Sydney University, is dedicated to leading strategic initiatives that ensure student success from pre-admission through to graduation and employment. Her role involves overseeing programs and policies that support academic achievement, student belonging and well-being, career readiness, and fostering a holistic approach to student success.

Alpha's career in the higher education sector is dedicated to co-producing solutions to address society's most pressing challenges. A professor of sociology, her recent work includes: *The Digital Social: Religion and Belief* (deGruyter) and an edited volume on *Health sociology* (Pearson). Alpha is currently involved in ongoing research that focuses on higher education, risk society, religion, digital sociology and methodologies.





Professor Kylie Readman

Professor Kylie Readman is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) at the University of Technology Sydney. In that role, Kylie focuses on creating the institutional conditions for building staff and student capacity in learning, teaching, and the student experience, centered around academic engagement, belonging, well-being, and partnerships. Ensuring student equity is a central theme of her work, including several research projects that investigate the experience of students from a range of diverse backgrounds which are under-represented in higher education. She has had many years' experiences in leading innovation at the whole-of-institution level, including strategy, resourcing, curriculum integration and product design and campus master planning. Kylie is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a 2020 recipient of an Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia Champion for Change citation.



Dr Timothy Renick

Named one of Fortune's World's 50 Greatest Leaders, Dr. Timothy Renick is the founding Executive Director of the National Institute for Student Success and Professor at Georgia State University. From 2008–2020, he led student success efforts that improved graduation rates by 70% and eliminated equity gaps by race, ethnicity, and income. Dr. Renick has testified before the U.S. Senate and House, spoken at the White House, and been featured by major media outlets. He has received numerous honours, including the McGraw Prize in Higher Education and the Award for National Leadership in Student Success Innovation. His institute earned the U.S. Department of Education's Trailblazer Award, and his work was chronicled in *Won't Lose This Dream* by Andrew Gumbel. A summa cum laude graduate of Dartmouth, he holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in Religion from Princeton.





Professor Shamit Saggar CBE FAcSS

In addition to being ACSES's Executive Director, Professor Shamit Saggar is a Visiting Professor at King's College, London and an Emeritus Professor at the University of Essex. He has 37 years of experience in international academia, government, business, regulation and philanthropy, is a former Senior Advisor to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, and a Knowledge Exchange Fellow in the David Cameron administration. Shamit was previously Director of the UWA Public Policy Institute. He has held personal chairs, visiting professorships and senior management roles at Essex, Sussex, Liverpool and Queen Mary in the UK, and at UCLA, Yale and Toronto in North America. He has published six books, 70+ journal papers and book chapters, and 20+ policy reports. His research grant capture exceeds \$70m.



Karen Seary

Karen Seary is the Associate Dean, School of Access Education at CQUniversity. The School hosts CQUniversity's Enabling course, the Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS) and the academic learning support services offered to higher education and vocational education students by the Academic Learning Centre. Karen's research interests centre on adult education, transformative learning and transition pedagogy. Karen has been recognised as a national champion for change by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) and Equity Partners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA), as part of the World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED). This award recognises and celebrates the life changing work of student equity practitioners across the world in supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, into and through higher education. Karen is currently the Chair of the National Association of Enabling Educators Australia (NAEEA).





Luke Sheehy

Mr Luke Sheehy commenced as the CEO of Universities Australia in February 2024. He is a highly skilled leader with more than 20 years' experience shaping the agenda of higher education.

Prior to UA, Mr Sheehy led the Australian Technology Network of Universities for almost five years. He has also held key education roles in government, worked as an education and strategy consultant for the Asian Development Bank and held senior management roles at Swinburne University.

As the first member of his family to graduate from university, Mr Sheehy knows first-hand the power of education to transform lives and is driven to ensure that opportunity is provided to as many people as possible.



Lachlan Sibir

Lachlan is a proud Kamilaroi man who grew up in Western Sydney on Darug Country. He holds a Bachelor of Teaching and Arts from the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and is currently pursuing his honours in history at the University of Sydney. His thesis explores the Voice Referendum and how the use of history as a political tool led to its outcome.

Over the past five years, Lachlan has worked in schools as a School Learning Support Officer (SLSO) and as a history, Aboriginal Studies, and geography teacher. He has also worked as a research intern and assistant in Indigenous Education at ACU, and more recently in Placement Poverty at the University of Sydney. He hopes to later complete a PHD and/or work in Indigenous public policy.





Sonal Singh

With more than 15 years in higher education, Sonal has shaped sector-wide strategies and led transformative national research, driving change in regional and remote partnerships, refugee education, and culturally inclusive practice. She has led multiple National Priority Pool Projects, and an Office for Learning and Teaching project focused on refugee pathways. Before joining UTS, Sonal led Widening Participation at Macquarie University. She played key leadership role in university consortia across NSW and now nationally, driving collaboration to expand equity pathways and reimagine alternative admissions for students historically excluded from higher education. Sonal received the NSW Humanitarian Award in 2023, and advocates for systemic change grounded in community partnerships, cultural respect, and a belief in the transformative power of education.



Dylan Storer

Dylan is a youth advocate, broadcaster and environmentalist. Raised in the Kimberley, he's committed to working to make sure that the voices of our future are not left out of our present. Dylan has worked with the ABC, Guardian Australia and was the 2021 Northern Australia Liaison to the Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations. Dylan is currently the President of UN Youth WA, works for WA's peak environmental organisation and represents the interests of students as a member of the 55th Curtin Student Guild Council.





Penny Szybiak

Penny Szybiak is the Director of Planning and Performance at Charles Darwin University (CDU). 70% of all CDU students are equity students; and through her role at CDU she has been heavily involved in institutional research focused maximizing on equity student outcomes at CDU and within the broader tertiary sector. Penny is also an Executive Committee member of the Australian Network of University Planners and through this group has been closely involved with the evolution of equity student funding policy in recent years.



Dr Patricia Vermillion Peirce CE

Dr Patricia Vermillion Peirce is a credentialed evaluator, designated by the Canadian Evaluation Society, with expertise in experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation designs. She brings more than 20 years of professional experience and has delivered more than 100 independent evaluations for a range of international governments and agencies. Her work spans from leading small pilot studies to large-scale evaluations and trials of national significance, as well as multi-country evaluations. Patricia holds two master's degrees from Queen Mary, University of London, and a PhD from Victoria University of Wellington.





Mark Warburton

Mark Warburton is an Honorary Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne. He is an adviser and consultant on higher education and VET, particularly in relation to funding arrangements. Mark has experience in labour market analysis and programs of assistance for disadvantaged jobseekers. He worked in these areas for over three decades while employed within the APS.



Alec Webb

Alec is the Chief Executive Officer at the Regional Universities Network where he advocates for and champions the impact and importance of regional higher education.

Alec has more than 10 years of experience as a leader and collaborator in a variety of sectors including the public service, higher education advocacy and economic and public policy consulting within Australian and the United Kingdom. Prior to being the CEO of RUN, Alec was the Head of Policy and Member Engagement at a London based higher education network and was previously the Acting Executive Director and Head of Policy at the Australian Technology Network of Universities.

He holds a Master of Business Administration from University of Queensland, a Master of Management from the Australian National Universities and a Bachelor of Business and Finance from Queensland University of Technology.





Uncle Michael West

Michael is a member, cultural representative and Traditional Custodian with fellow Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council members, being responsible for the Land, Air, Water, History, Traditions and Culture within our boundaries. He is a member of the Stolen Generations, an Aboriginal man of the Gamilaroi Nation and was born, raised and has lived his whole life in Sydney. Michael is proud to be part of the oldest living Civilisation, encompassing History, Knowledge, Ceremony, Traditions and Culture practiced for more than 65,000 years. Michael sees himself as an educator sharing stories spanning from contemporary urban based Artist to cultural representative with Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council. Burning and creating "Message Sticks" is a way of practicing his culture. They are used for symbolism, marking points in the continuum and the education of people about history and Aboriginal perspectives.



Distinguished Professor George Williams AO

Distinguished Professor George Williams AO is the Vice-Chancellor and President at Western Sydney University. He is proud to lead an institution renowned for providing broad access to higher education and for achieving real-world impact through positive social, environmental and economic change in Western Sydney and globally. Professor Williams commenced as Western Sydney University's fifth Vice-Chancellor in July 2024, bringing decades of experience as a constitutional law scholar and teacher, senior leader in higher education, barrister, and as a national thought leader.





Dr Tracy Woodroffe

Dr Tracy Woodroffe was a 2024 ACSES First Nations Fellow. She is a Senior Lecturer and Researcher in the Faculty of Arts and Society, specialising in Teacher Education and the significance of culture and inclusive teaching practice. Dr Woodroffe is a Warumungu Luritja woman with extensive experience in Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary classrooms. Her interests are in educational pedagogy, identity, perspective, and cultural responsiveness. Dr Woodroffe's work includes Indigenous methodology in examining the Australian education system through an Indigenous lens.



Dr Nadine Zacharias

Dr Nadine Zacharias is the Managing Director and Founder of Equity by Design, a specialist consulting firm in student equity strategy, program evaluation, and inclusive service design.

Nadine has held senior management roles at Swinburne and Deakin Universities, led ground-breaking research projects, and been a thought leader in student equity policy over the past 15 years.



Welcome to Country

Day 1 | 9 September | 9:20am–9:30am



Uncle Michael West
Cultural Representative,
Metropolitan Local Aboriginal
Land Council



Welcome from UTS

Day 1 | 9 September | 9:30am–9:40am



Professor Kylie Readman
Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Education and Students, UTS



Opening Remarks

Day 1 | 9 September | 9:40am–9:55am



Professor Shamit Saggar
CBE FAcSS
Executive Director, ACSES



Professor Ian Li SFHEA
Research and Policy
Program Director, ACSES



Panel 1:

Success from the Perspective of Students

Day 1 | 9 September | 10:00am–11:30am



Em Bagg

PhD Candidate,
Deakin University



Kayla Barker-Peris

Student, UTS



Eunice Cheng

Student, UNSW



Samuel North

Student, UNSW



Lachlan Sibir

Student, University of
Sydney



Dr Nicola Cull

(Moderator)

Associate Director Equity
and Inclusion, Australian
Catholic University



Keynote Address Q&A Session

Day 1 | 9 September | 11:30am–12:00pm



**The Hon. Jason
Clare**
(Keynote Speaker)
Education Minister



Professor Harlene Hayne
CNZM
(Moderator)
Vice-Chancellor, Curtin
University
ACSES, Chair



Panel 2:

What Works for Regional Student Outcomes?

Day 1 | 9 September | 1:00pm–2:30pm



Dr Kylie Austin

Director, Student Life,
Edith Cowan University



Timothy Connolly

Alumni, University of Newcastle



Professor Chris Moran

Vice-Chancellor and CEO,
University of New England



Natalie Nelmes

Director, Geraldton
Universities Centre



Alec Webb

CEO, Regional Universities
Network



The Hon. Fiona Nash

(Moderator)
Regional Education
Commissioner



Panel 3:

Financing the Future – Innovation and Equity in Higher Education Funding

Day 1 | 9 September | 3:00pm–4:15pm



**Associate Professor
Gwilym Croucher**
Deputy Director,
The University of Melbourne



Professor Andrew Norton
Professor of Higher
Education Policy, Monash
Business School



Penny Szybiak
Director, Planning and
Performance, Charles
Darwin University



Mark Warburton
Honorary Senior Fellow, Centre
for the Study of Higher Education,
University of Melbourne



Dr Catherine de Fontenay
(Moderator)
Commissioner,
Productivity Commission



Keynote Address

Day 2 | 10 September | 9:15am–9:45am



**Senator the Hon.
Jonathon Duniam**
*(Keynote Speaker,
via recording)*
Shadow Minister for
Education



The Georgia State Model: Using AI and Analytics to Transform Outcomes for Underserved Students

Day 2 | 10 September | 9:45am–10:45am



Dr Timothy Renick
(Keynote Speaker, via livestream)
Executive Director, National
Institute for Student Success,
Georgia State University



Professor Shaun Ewen
Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Education, Griffith University



Sonal Singh
Head of Equity Pathways,
Centre for Social Justice and
Inclusion, UTS



Dr Nadine Zacharias
Managing Director,
Equity by Design



Professor Shamit Saggar CBE FAcSS
(Moderator)
Executive Director, ACSES



Panel 4:

Alternative Pathways into University

Day 2 | 10 September | 11:00am–12:15pm



Jenny Dodd

CEO, TAFE Directors Australia



Professor Barney

Glover AO

Commissioner, Jobs and
Skills Australia



Professor

Alpha Possamai-Inesedy

Pro Vice-Chancellor, Student
Success, Western Sydney
University



Karen Seary

Associate Dean, School of
Access Education,
CQUniversity



Sonal Singh

(Moderator)

Head of Equity Pathways,
Centre for Social Justice and
Inclusion, UTS



Panel 5:

Getting it Right: Equity, Policy, and Data

Day 2 | 10 September | 1:15pm–2:30pm



Dr Angela Baker
Director, Head of
Education Sector



Geoffrey Mitchell
Project Manager Widening
Participation, Queensland
Department of Education



Dr Fiona Navin
Director, Access and Equity,
Edith Cowan University



Kristy Naylor
Director, Market Analysis
and Data Reform section,
Higher Education,
Department of Education



**Associate Professor
Gemma Cadby**
(Moderator)
Data Program Director,
ACSES



Panel 6:

Reimagining Equity in Higher Education

Day 2 | 10 September | 3:00pm–4:15pm



Sarah Bendall

First Assistant Ombudsman,
National Student Ombudsman



Dr Matt Brett

Director Academic
Governance and Standards,
Deakin University



Dylan Storer

President, Student Guild, Curtin
University



**Dr Patricia
Vermillion Peirce CE**
Trials Lead, ACSES



Dr Tracy Woodroffe
Senior Lecturer, Humanities,
Charles Darwin University
(ACSES 2024 First Nations
Fellow)



**Distinguished Professor
George Williams AO**
(Moderator)
Vice-Chancellor and
President, Western Sydney
University



Symposium Closing

Day 2 | 10 September | 4:15pm–4:45pm



Luke Sheehy
(Keynote Speaker)
CEO, Universities Australia



Professor Ian Li SFHEA
Research and Policy
Program Director, ACSES



Eunice Cheng
Student, UNSW





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