



Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success

Annual Report 2025

Universities For All



Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success acknowledges Indigenous peoples across Australia as the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the nation's campuses are situated. With a history spanning more than 60,000 years as the original educators, Indigenous peoples hold a unique place in our nation. We recognise the importance of their knowledge and culture, and reflect the principles of participation, equity, and cultural respect in our work. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and future, and consider it an honour to learn from our Indigenous colleagues, partners, and friends.



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Message from the Executive Director

If 2024 was a year of renewal, 2025 was when the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) cemented its status as a nation-leading research and policy centre.

Throughout the year, ACSES was front and centre in national higher education policy discussions, building on its reputation as a trusted source of advice for policymakers and university leaders.

The Centre increased its visibility through innovative new initiatives such as our trials program, sector-leading data products, and impactful research. All of this resulted in high-profile national and international media coverage and record growth in digital engagement.

In addition, in just two years, the ACSES Policy Symposium has established itself as a key annual gathering of sector leaders for exploring transformative policy and practice that drives meaningful change for underrepresented students, and we look forward to growing this event further in coming years.

After contributing to the landmark Australian Universities Accord Review, ACSES has supported the implementation of its key recommendations in 2025—including the formation of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC)—and we look forward to working with the Commission to further the goal of widening student participation and achievement.

As we move into 2026, equity will retain its prominence in Australian higher education, and ACSES is firmly positioned to continue generating thought-leading research while supporting impactful policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners, stakeholders, and the entire ACSES team for their dedication as we continue working together to make higher education fairer and more equitable for all.



Professor Shamit Saggar CBE FAcSS

Executive Director

Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success



Message from the Advisory Board Chair

Throughout 2025, the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) has consistently delivered on its mission to generate evidence-based solutions that widen access to higher education and improve outcomes for underrepresented students.

With its expanded offering of innovative trials, research, and data analysis, the Centre continues to drive the national discussion on student equity policy design and implementation.

Students today are navigating a period of significant change, with rising living costs adding pressure to balancing study with longer working hours. Their needs are constantly evolving and it's up to institutions and policymakers to keep up by providing the types of support required for them to succeed

Through thought-leading publications such as its new *Equity Insights* series, ACSES is at the forefront of examining the challenges facing disadvantaged students and remains a trusted advisor to universities and governments.

As this Annual Report attests, both ACSES and its host institution Curtin University share an unwavering commitment to meeting these challenges head-on. A shared commitment to the core values of integrity and impact; to upholding honesty and accountability while delivering tangible, measurable outcomes that remove barriers to student success.

I'd like to thank the ACSES team for staying true to the Centre's mission as well as my colleagues on the Advisory Board and the members of ACSES's two independent committees for their ongoing work to support the governance of the Centre.

I look forward to the opportunities 2026 brings as ACSES continues equipping the sector with new knowledge and tools to tackle and help resolve the most pressing student equity issues.



Professor Harlene Hayne CNZM

Vice-Chancellor

Curtin University

Advisory Board Chair

Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success

About ACSES

The Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) is a national research and policy centre based at Curtin University and funded by the Australian Government Department of Education.

ACSES examines student equity issues in Australian higher education with a view to identifying initiatives that can be implemented to impact positively on the outcomes and wellbeing of current and prospective university students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Centre partners with universities to provide research-backed guidance to help practitioners, educators, and policymakers close equity gaps in higher education, with a focus on generating and using evidence to inform impactful policy and practice across the sector.

As a What Works Centre, ACSES is governed by sector leaders, including Vice-Chancellors, ensuring strategic alignment and informing evidence-based interventions that drive real-world outcomes and a fairer higher education system for all.



> ACSES leadership (L-R): Matt Brett, John Phillimore, Shamit Saggar, Ian Li, Gemma Cadby, and Tim Pitman

Values statement

The ACSES team is driven by a commitment to five core values collectively identified by our staff and embedded in everything we do.

- > **Integrity:** We uphold the highest standards of honesty and transparency in all that we do, ensuring trust and accountability in our work.
- > **Fairness:** We are dedicated to creating a level playing field for all students, advocating for equitable access and opportunities.
- > **Collaboration:** We believe that working together—within our team, with our stakeholders, and across the sector—is essential to achieving meaningful impact.
- > **Innovation:** We seek out and embrace new ideas and approaches to solve challenges, always striving to stay at the forefront of research and practice.
- > **Impact:** We are focused on delivering real, measurable outcomes that make a difference in the lives of students and contribute to a more inclusive education system.

These values guide our mission to deliver the latest student equity data through innovative trials, evaluation, and research aimed at informing better practice in Australian higher education.

Purpose of this report

This Annual Report covers the calendar year 2025 and outlines ACSES's operations, activities, impact, and strategic direction.

It contains an overview of progress and performance across our three key programs—Data, Research and Policy, and Trials and Evaluation—as well as funding, operations, compliance, and governance details.

The report also presents a summary of communications, stakeholder engagement, publications, and events delivered throughout the year to maximise ACSES's visibility and impact in the higher education sector.

> Members of the ACSES team attending the ACSES Symposium 2025



2025 at a glance

Key highlights

- Full commitment of funds for Equity Frontiers Trials Program and launch of new Trials Registry
- 2025 Small Grants, Large Grants, First Nations Fellowships, Equity Fellowships, Visiting Scholars Program, and Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Stipends Scheme
- Launch of new Impact Grants Program
- Student Equity in an Era of Change 2025: The Australian Student Equity Symposium
- First annual ACSES Awards for Innovation and Excellence in Impact on Higher Education Policy and Practice
- ACSES *Education and Work Survey* added as module to QILT *Student Experience Survey*
- Launch of evaluation skills training modules via ACSES Equity Hub
- Launch of Education Data Sources
- Relaunch of the upgraded Interactive Data Tool

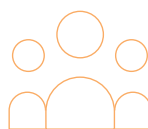
Major publications

- *Equity Insights 2025: Policy, Power, and Practice for a Fairer Australian Tertiary Education System*
- Three *Data Insights Series* reports
- Two *Student Equity Data Guides*
- Eleven research publications

Stats

Events

18



Media reach

326.6m

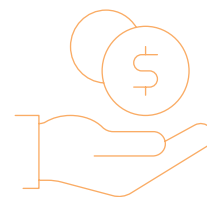


ACSES Fellowships

4

Grants funded

13



2

Visiting Scholarships

HDRS



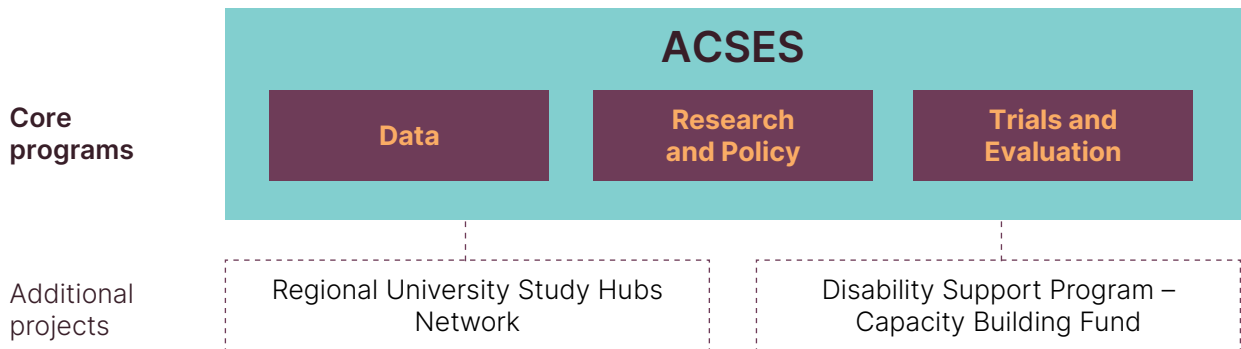
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19



Publications

In brief: Our programs and projects



Our core programs

ACSES's core work is delivered through three programs: Data, Research and Policy, and Trials and Evaluation.

Data Program

The ACSES Data Program increases access to and the quality of higher education student equity data and reporting in Australia by consolidating and leveraging data sources nationwide to generate valuable insights. It is a trusted source of expertise in the sector, delivering and supporting nation-leading data collection, collation, handling, and dissemination capability via a range of products and analyses.



Research and Policy Program

The ACSES Research and Policy Program delivers nation-leading research and practice capability that informs policies and interventions designed to improve student enrolments, experience, and completions among equity group students. It supports the production and dissemination of research, engaging with higher education researchers and practitioners through its nationally competitive grants and fellowships programs.



Trials and Evaluation Program

The ACSES Trials and Evaluation Program pioneers innovation in higher education, delivering tangible outcomes in the pursuit of student equity. It encompasses an impactful program of work, funding a portfolio of predominantly practitioner-led projects underpinned by rigorous methodologies. Our trials and evaluations span diverse initiatives distributed across universities, states and territories, and institutional groupings, ensuring broad sectoral relevance.



Additional projects managed by ACSES

ACSES also manages two significant projects under separate Australian Government Department of Education funding agreements: the Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH) Network and the Higher Education Disability Support Program – Capacity Building Fund.

The RUSH Network

The RUSH Network was established by ACSES (then the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education [NCSEHE]) in 2021 to support staff at [Regional University Study Hubs](#), fostering collaboration through a community-of-practice approach. In 2022,

the Department of Education awarded ACSES a \$1.6 million contract to continue managing the Network through to June 2027. The Network expanded to 56 hubs in February 2025, following the release of data showing a 32% increase in the previous year of students using the existing 43 centres nationwide.

Disability Support Program – Capacity Building Fund

The Capacity Building Fund (CBF) is one of three components of the Department of Education's Higher Education Disability Support Program. The CBF provides capacity- and capability-building support to Table A providers to help strengthen their internal skills, abilities, processes, and resources to support students with disability to access, participate, and succeed in higher education. In 2025, the Department awarded ACSES a \$1.1 million grant to continue managing the CBF through to December 2027.



2025: The year in review

2025 was another momentous year for ACSES, with the Centre continuing to expand its presence and influence throughout the higher education sector.

One year on from its relaunch from NCSEHE, ACSES has solidified its reputation as a nation-leading What Works Centre, achieving full brand integration and introducing innovative new initiatives across its three core programs.

Data Program

ACSES's Data Program saw strong uptake and growing demand for data resources and support in 2025.

In April, ACSES's flagship [Interactive Data Tool](#) was relaunched with improved accessibility and mobile compatibility following extensive user testing. Subsequent updates to the Tool included an additional tab that displays Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) *Student Experience Survey* data at an institutional and equity group level. An "Explore examples" button was also added, which provides a starting point for users. The Tool averaged more than 190 unique monthly users in 2025, totalling over 4,150 visits for the year.

In other major activity, the Data team worked with ACSES Visiting Scholar Geoffrey Mitchell to develop and launch [Education Data Sources](#), a web-based tool that brings together publicly available data on schooling, vocational education and training (VET), and higher education participation and attainment from across Australia. Hosted on the ACSES website, this curated, sortable, and searchable table includes the details of 103 datasets across six key Australian education domains. This important work forms part of the team's ongoing efforts to consolidate student equity data sources nationwide and leverage this data to generate valuable insights.

ACSES's *Education and Work Survey* was added as a module to the QILT *Student Experience Survey* and launched in August 2025 in collaboration with the Research and Policy Program. Forty of 42 universities agreed to participate in the survey, with ACSES due to receive unit record data in early 2026.

Meanwhile, our [Data Insights Series](#) continues to track well, with new reports on student retention rates and mode of attendance in Australian higher education downloaded hundreds of times and attracting more than 1,500 page visits.

Other Data Program publications in 2025 included two new [Student Equity Data Guides](#), covering best practices for data reporting and challenges in comparing student outcomes across institutions. In addition, all four previous *Student Equity Data Guides*, as well as the [Data Insights Series report on students with disability](#), were reviewed and updated. The Data Program also collaborated with Jobs and Skills Australia on its [Higher Education Outcomes – Exploring Administrative Data](#) report, released in November, which generated significant interest across the sector.

Highlight:

“ ACSES's *Interactive Data Tool* averaged more than 190 unique monthly users in 2025 and totalled over 4,150 visits for the year. ”

Research and Policy Program

In addition to funding a range of new projects, ACSES's Research and Policy Program entered a publication phase in 2025 with the release of findings from its 2023–24 [Small Grants Research Program](#). All 10 final reports were either published or nearing release as of 31 December 2025, following the launch of the 2025–26 round in May 2025. Ten projects were selected for the new round, examining subjects ranging from health and wellbeing effects on First Nations Australian students' completion rates to equity students' use of artificial intelligence.

All three 2025–26 [Large Grants Research Program](#) projects were also contracted, with work now underway and draft reports expected from February 2026. The three projects awarded funding in the 2024–25 round were granted extensions, with final reports expected in early 2026.

The Research and Policy team also launched a new round of the Visiting Scholars Program in 2025. Dr Franziska Lessky (University of Innsbruck) and Dr Sean Bracken (University of Worcester) were hosted at ACSES in May–June 2025, with their final reports expected by July 2026 along with further project outputs over the second half of the year. 2025 also saw all six Visiting Scholars from the 2023–24 round produce final research reports and present their findings in a range of public forums.

Two candidates were selected for the 2025 Equity Fellowships round, with Darlene McLennan (University of Tasmania) and Associate Professor Kelly Linden (Charles

Snapshot:

“ In 2025, ACSES funded 22 new research initiatives, including 10 Small Grants projects, three Large Grants projects, five HDR Stipends projects, two First Nations Fellowships, and two Equity Fellowships. ”

> The Hon. Jason Clare MP addressing the ACSES Student Equity Symposium 2025





› The ACSES team welcomes a Visiting Scholar (L-R): Gemma Cadby, Paul Koshy, Varun Mehta, Ian Li, Franziska Lessky, Miriam Fisher, and Tim Pitman

Sturt University) formally commencing their projects at ACSES's March 2025 Fellowship Forum. Their final reports are due for release in 2026, while the work of 2024 Equity Fellows Associate Professor Amani Bell (The University of Sydney) and Danielle Keenan (University of Technology Sydney) were published in October and November 2025 respectively.

First Nations Fellowships were awarded to Dr Lauren Tynan (Macquarie University) and Dr John Doolah (The University of Melbourne). 2024 First Nations Fellows Professor Peter Anderson and Dr Tracy Woodroffe published their finished work in late 2025 after presenting key findings to the Department of Education and at the ACSES Fellowship Forum.

The ACSES Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Stipends Scheme continues to track well, with three project leads from the inaugural intake presenting their research findings via an ACSES webinar in November 2025. The 2025–26 funding round was launched in February 2025, with five projects funded covering topics including the community impact of Regional University Study Hubs, determinants of mental health and academic success in student equity groups, and improving educational aspirations for high-school students with disability.

As an adjunct to its internal research work and nationally competitive grants and fellowships funding programs, the Research and Policy team initiated the Impact Grants Program in 2025. The program will provide \$987,894 in funding sourced via surplus or returned funds from other ACSES initiatives. The Impact Grants Program will support impactful, directly commissioned projects that either directly address policy questions or provide resources for research and practice in higher education equity.

A major highlight was the ACSES [Student Equity Symposium 2025](#), held in Sydney on 9–10 September, which attracted 170 in-person attendees and a further 500 registrants via livestream. Featuring prominent keynote speakers headed by the Minister for Education, the Hon. Jason Clare MP, and panel sessions with equity experts from across Australia, the event was an opportunity for international experts, government representatives, and diverse student voices to explore transformative practices and policies aimed at creating accessible and inclusive higher education pathways. As it enters its third year, the Symposium is firmly established as a key annual gathering for the discussion of equity policy and practice in Australia.

Trials and Evaluation Program

Our Trials and Evaluation Program performed strongly against its objectives in 2025 and reached a major milestone with the full commitment of its funds for trials and evaluations. In total, 20 projects have been funded through to early 2027 via the flagship [Equity Frontiers Trials Program](#), including 16 randomised controlled trials or quasi-experimental design studies, two feasibility trials, and two evaluations.

Snapshot:

“ACSES has funded 20 trials and evaluations through to early 2027, including 16 randomised controlled trials or quasi-experimental design studies, two feasibility trials, and two evaluations.”

The funding of trials is being tracked via ACSES's new [Trials Registry](#), launched in January 2025. The Trials Registry is Australia's first national platform dedicated to showcasing rigorous, evidence-based equity trials, providing a vital open access resource for the sector. In 2025, five trial protocols and the first completed, peer-reviewed trial final report were made available on the Trials Registry. With a focus on exploring the impact of tailored student management practices on academically at-risk first-year students, the report garnered significant attention in the sector.

Underpinning the Trials and Evaluation Program's conduct is ACSES's ongoing work to build evaluative capacity in the sector. Together with ACSES's [Equity Hub](#), the Centre's Community of Practice (CoP) events provided forums for practitioners to exchange experiences and acquire expertise in evaluation throughout 2025. Via the Equity Hub, ACSES also commenced the launch of 22 training modules focused on building evaluation skills for equity professionals within the context of the Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework (SEHEEF). This marks another critical achievement—one the Trials and Evaluation team will continue building on in the future.



> Members of the ACSES team and Equity Hub Community of Practice gathered in Perth in March 2025 for one of three CoP events this year

Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

One year on from our rebrand from NCSEHE to ACSES, the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement team has continued to play a key role increasing the visibility of the new-look Centre, with record growth in digital engagement in 2025.

Metrics, newsletter, and website traffic surged while social media audiences rose across all major platforms including LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube—a testament to ACSES's expanding recognition across the Australian higher education sector.

Media engagement also increased in 2025, with high-profile coverage in national and international industry publications including *Times Higher Education*, *Teacher Magazine*, *Future Campus*, *The Koala*, *University World News*, *Higher Education Whisperer*, and *The Australian Educational Researcher*. In addition, ACSES featured prominently in coverage from mainstream media outlets including *ABC*, *SBS*, *The Australian Financial Review*, *The Conversation*, *Business News*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Canberra Times*, *NT News*, *Gold Coast Bulletin*, *The Guardian*, and *Irish Examiner*.

The team continued to deepen partnerships with universities and build on relationships with key stakeholders. This included leading the planning and delivery of all ACSES events, from webinars and information sessions to major calendar highlights such as the [Student Equity Symposium 2025](#), and the inaugural [ACSES Awards](#), both of which will continue in 2026.

The team was central to the production and promotion of all major ACSES reports and publications, which saw a marked increase in 2025 with a total of 19 publications (compared to nine in 2024). This included the inaugural [Equity Insights 2025 report](#), which showcased thought-leading contributions on equity challenges from sector leaders, policymakers, practitioners, and students, driving evidence-informed dialogue across the sector.



Quick stat:

- **Media mentions:**
+132% (158 to 366)
- **Media reach:**
+210% (105.4m to 326.6m)
- **Estimated advertising value:**
+181% (\$8.1m to \$22.8m)
- **LinkedIn followers:**
+42% (2,371 to 3,377)
- **YouTube watch time:**
+81% (215hrs to 390hrs)
- **YouTube subscribers:**
+48% (71 to 105)
- **Website users:**
+39% (39,607 to 55,163)
- **Website document downloads:**
+126% (5,401 to 12,200)
- **Equity Hub users:**
+124% (1,792 to 4,007)
- **Equity Hub document downloads:**
+39% (366 to 510)

Snapshot:

“ The Communications and Stakeholder Engagement team supported the production and promotion of 19 major ACSES publications in 2025. ”

Business and Operations

As ACSES forges ahead with an expanded offering of research and engagement initiatives, the Business and Operations team continues to maintain strong financial management and effective governance.

Throughout 2025, the team's commitment to accountability, efficiency, and long-term sustainability underpinned robust reporting practices and the responsible and effective expenditure of taxpayer funds.

In 2025, the team:

- met all financial obligations within approved budgets, while managing a funding portfolio worth more than a combined \$24.6 million
- supported the Centre's ongoing expansion by ensuring highly efficient internal processes across HR, procurement, and reporting



- supported recruitment across the Centre's key program areas, including the addition of four new staff members in the second half of 2025, bringing the total number of ACSES staff to 22.

With ACSES's budget confirmed to June 2027 following the extension of its Conditions of Grant agreement, the Business and Operations team remains committed to delivering sound stewardship to progress the Centre's activities, outputs, and impacts throughout 2026 and beyond.

➤ The Hon. Jason Clare MP (Minister for Education) and Harlene Hayne (Vice-Chancellor, Curtin University) visit the ACSES offices in Perth

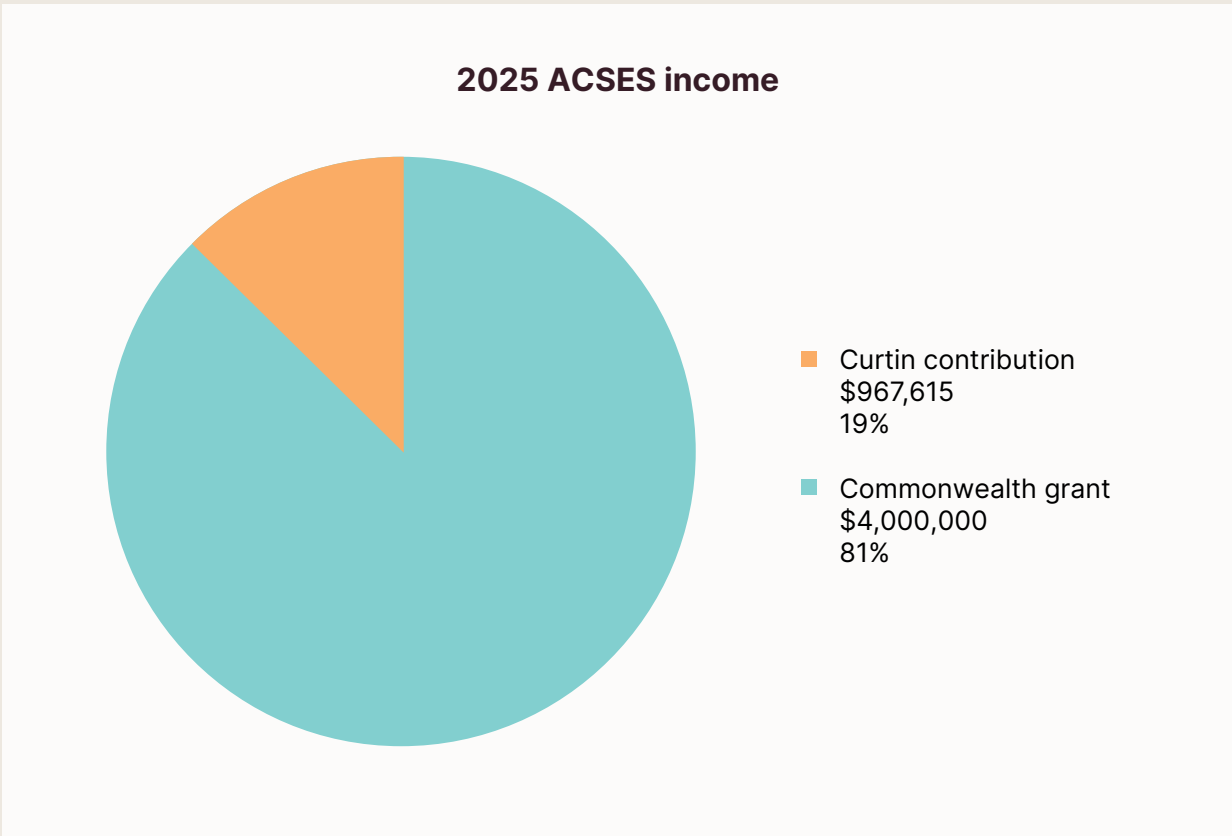


Financial management and funding sources

ACSES continued to demonstrate sound financial stewardship in 2025, ensuring the Centre's activities were delivered within approved budgets and in accordance with funding agreements and institutional requirements.

Hosted by Curtin University, ACSES is principally funded by a \$20.5 million Commonwealth grant committed in October 2022. The grant enabled the Centre's expansion from October 2022 to June 2026 and was complemented by approximately \$3.5m in cash contributions from Curtin University.

In the second half of 2025, following the Department of Education's decision to extend ACSES's Conditions of Grant agreement to June 2027 without additional Commonwealth funding, Curtin University committed a further approximately \$660,000 for 2026–27. This brought Curtin University's total cash contribution to \$4.15m, or 17% of total project cash funding. The additional investment supports ongoing staff salary costs and will enable ACSES to continue delivering key initiatives through the final year of the agreement.



Funding supports both core operations and strategic program delivery, with expenditure in 2025 allocated as follows:

- > 11% to Centre administration, including staffing and associated infrastructure
- > 1% to governance, supporting oversight and advisory functions
- > 8% to the Data Program, which focuses on improving data infrastructure and analysis to guide evidence-based practice
- > 35% to the Research and Policy Program, including competitive Equity Fellowships, First Nations Fellowships, Small Research Grants, Large Research Grants, and Impact Grants
- > 44% to the Trials and Evaluation Program and the Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework (SEHEEF) project, which funds new and scaled-up equity trials, implementation projects, and impact evaluations across the sector.

In 2025, funding was primarily directed to sector-facing activities, including the Trials and Evaluation Program, SEHEEF, and the Research and Policy Program, with smaller allocations supporting administration, data capability, and governance.

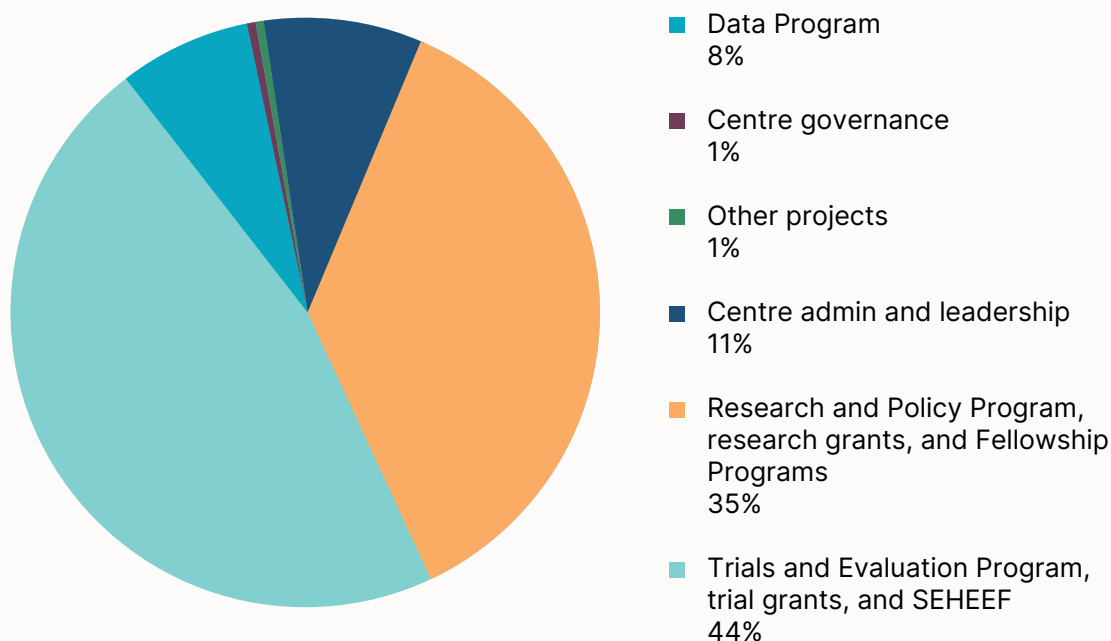
The Trials and Evaluation Program also shifted toward capacity-building, contributing to the extension of activities to June 2027 and a more evenly distributed expenditure profile.

Throughout this period, strong financial controls and reporting practices supported accountability, value for money, compliance, and responsible management of public funding.

Quick stat:

“ In 2025, 44% of ACSES expenditure supported the Trials and Evaluation Program, with 35% allocated to Research and Policy, and 8% to the Data Program. ”

2025 ACSES expenditure



Governance

ACSES remains committed to best practice in governance and compliance and embedded in a strong web of accountabilities—to its Advisory Board, Curtin University, and the Australian Government Department of Education.

The Centre consolidated its operations during the second half of 2025 following the extension of its Conditions of Grant agreement with the Department of Education to June 2027.

Under the agreement, Curtin University has overall responsibility for the delivery of

ACSES to the Department, with day-to-day responsibility for its performance residing with the Centre and its staff, under the leadership of its Executive Director, who reports directly to the Curtin University Provost.

ACSES regularly reports to the Department on its activities and progress against deliverables, including via biannual progress reports, the Centre's Annual Report and Strategic Plan which are both updated annually. As part of its day-to-day operations, ACSES maintains close contact with the Department by liaising with staff of the Higher Education Program Delivery branch.



Our Advisory Board

The Advisory Board was established under ACSES's current Conditions of Grant agreement and includes individuals drawn from a wide range of stakeholders, with members representing students, equity practitioners, and senior university management staff.

The Board provides feedback on ACSES's strategic positioning and related activities, seeking to:

- > provide strategic oversight and advice to the Centre on the development, implementation, and review of key governance documents, long-term plans, and reports
- > facilitate strategic engagement, including at Ministerial, Australian Public Service, and university executive levels
- > provide strategic advice to ACSES's senior leadership team to identify research and funding opportunities, maximise the Centre's strategic engagement, and expand the range of stakeholders involved in and aware of the Centre both nationally and internationally
- > provide strategic advice on sectoral and environmental changes, emerging priorities, the implications of the higher education student equity research agenda, and how this might impact policy settings
- > provide strategic advice and oversight of Centre risk management and compliance
- > establish conflict of interest disclosure policies and procedures for itself and require that all committees managing competitive grant and fellowship programs of the Centre establish appropriate policies of their own.



> ACSES Executive Director Shamit Saggar and Advisory Board members Leanne Holt, Kathleen Nelly, and Paul Harpur present the ACSES Awards 2025 to the winning teams

The Advisory Board has been chaired by Curtin University Vice-Chancellor Professor Harlene Hayne CNZM over the duration of the current Conditions of Grant agreement, based on a recommendation in its establishing report.

In 2025, the Advisory Board's membership comprised:

- > Professor Harlene Hayne CNZM (Curtin University) (Chair)
- > Professor Scott Bowman AO (Charles Darwin University)
- > John Craven (System 2)
- > Dr Nicola Cull (Australian Catholic University, Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Association)
- > Professor Paul Harpur OAM (The University of Queensland)
- > Suzi Hewlett (Manufacturing Industry Skills Alliance)
- > Professor Leanne Holt (UNSW Sydney)
- > Kathleen Nelly (Curtin University)
- > Professor Deborah Terry AC (The University of Queensland).

In the second half of 2025, Advisory Board members Dr Elizabeth Cook and Dr Kylie Austin vacated their positions, with Ms Kathleen Nelly indicating an intention to do so at the end of the year. Two new members, Dr Nicola Cull and Mr John Craven, were appointed to fill the respective vacancies created by Dr Austin's and Dr Cook's departures. As of 31 December 2025, ACSES was liaising with the Advisory Board Chair to refill the student representative position vacated by Ms Nelly.

The Advisory Board met four times in 2025, including an in-person meeting at the 2025 ACSES Policy Symposium.

> Universal Design for Learning workshop with Sean Bracken



Our committees

The Centre has two independent committees providing oversight for the selection and funding of projects in its nationally competitive research and trials programs.

Grants and Fellowships Committee

The Grants and Fellowships Committee's (G&FC) operations are stipulated in the Conditions of Grant agreement and include responsibility for the assessment of, and recommendations on, funding for applications to ACSES's four nationally competitive research programs: Small Research Grants, Large Research Grants, First Nations Fellowships, and Equity Fellowships.

During its operations to the end of 2025, the G&FC oversaw all nationally competitive rounds of funding across these programs, via its assessment of research grants at the committee level, and decision-making in relation to assessments made by its Selection Panels for the First Nations and Equity Fellowships.

The G&FC's 2025 membership comprised:

- > Professor Sally Kift (James Cook University) (Chair)
- > Professor Andrew Harvey (Griffith University)
- > Sonal Singh (University of Technology Sydney)
- > Dr Cathy Stone (The University of Newcastle)
- > Professor Gary Thomas (RMIT University).

> Kylie Readman (Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and Students, UTS) opens the ACSES Symposium 2025



In addition, ACSES would like to acknowledge the contributions of Professor Maria Raciti (The University of the Sunshine Coast), who was an inaugural member of the G&FC and Chair of the First Nations Selection Panel.

The G&FC met three times in 2025, primarily to manage the selection of the 2025 Round of the Small Research Grants Program. The committee was dissolved at the end of 2025 at the conclusion of ACSES's nationally competitive research funding obligations under the current Conditions of Grant agreement.

Equity Frontiers Grants Committee

The Equity Frontiers Grants Committee (EFGC) was established in 2024 to oversee and assess the award of grants under the Centre's Trials and Evaluation Program.

In 2025, the EFGC's membership comprised:

- > Associate Professor Mandy Downing (Curtin University)
- > Professor Jolanda Jetten FASSA (The University of Queensland)
- > Dr Cassy King (The University of Canberra)
- > Clinical Professor Michaela Lucas (The University of Western Australia)
- > Dr Mark Robinson (The University of Queensland).

In addition, ACSES would like to acknowledge the contributions of Associate Professor Tuguy Esgin (Curtin University), who was an inaugural member of the EFGC.

Shaping policy

The second half of 2025 saw ACSES Executive Director Shamit Saggar expand his role as a senior, active party in national higher education policy advice and discussions. This reflects the strategic positioning and growing profile of the Centre as a trusted source of advice and support to a range of senior stakeholders, including the Australian Government and university leaders.

There are three elements to the Executive Director's external role:

- > serving on key advisory bodies to shape higher education and equity policies (for example, membership of the Equity in Higher Education Panel and Higher Education Disability Roundtable)
- > providing specific policy and research advice in national policy formulation discussions (including regular meetings with Australian Tertiary Education Commission [ATEC] officials)
- > influencing policy priorities via high profile national and international conference and seminar presentations (for example, as a speaker at the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency [TEQSA] 2025 Annual Conference).

2026 and beyond

With ACSES's budget, timelines, and milestones now locked in until mid-2027, the Centre will continue progressing its activities and outputs while leading national conversations and engagement in student equity policy and practice.

As part of our updated Conditions of Grant agreement, ACSES enters 2026 undertaking work on two important new reviews. The first is an independent evaluation of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) program, to be carried out by the Centre, with work expected to start in early 2026. The second is an independent periodic External Review of ACSES, established by Curtin University in conjunction with the Department of Education. The Centre will prepare a comprehensive Self-Assessment Report to assist the panel appointed to complete the External Review, which will examine outcomes and impacts from the current Conditions of Grant agreement and position ACSES in the future.

ACSES is set to continue hosting the RUSH Network following the approval in October 2025 of the Network's new Conditions of

Grant agreement. Importantly, the extension in the RUSH Network's project activity period brings its Conditions of Grant agreement into alignment with ACSES's agreement.

Looking ahead, the Centre continues to operate in a challenging higher education environment, with external drivers—global, social, political, and institutional—shaping the context in which ACSES makes impactful contributions to student equity.

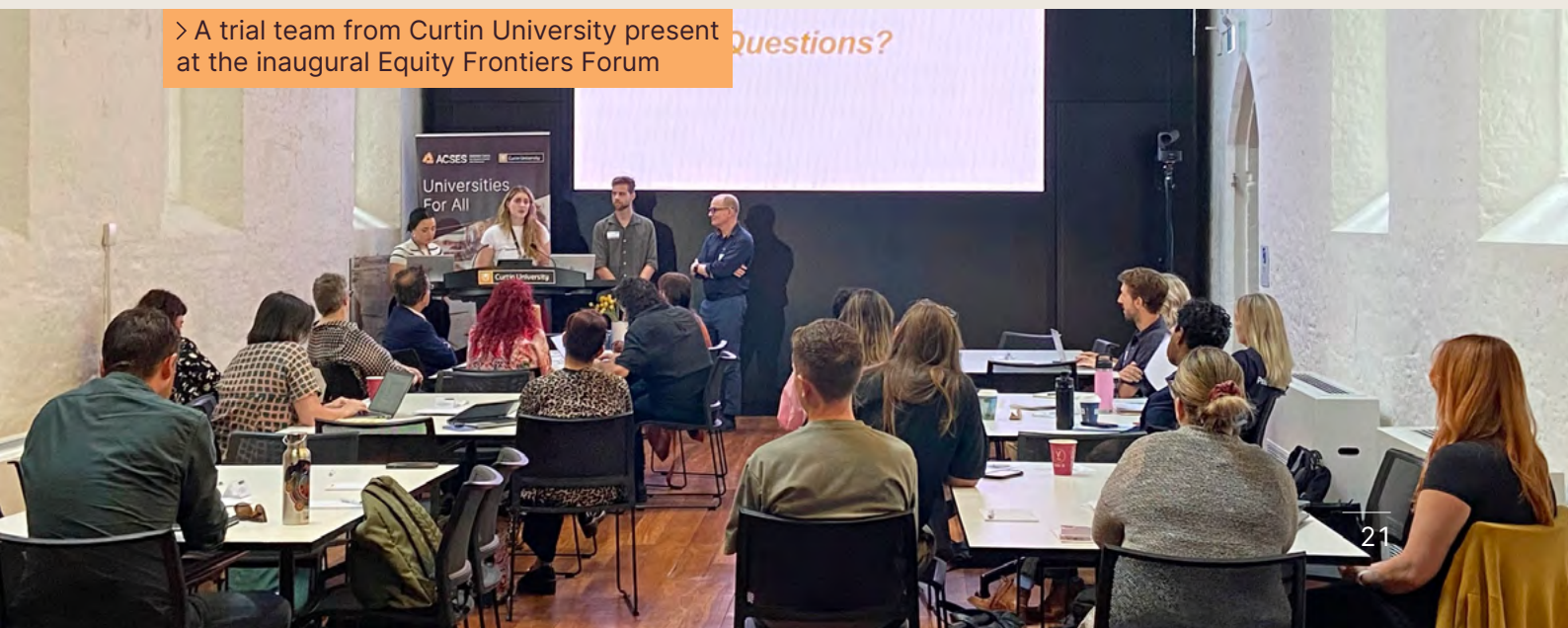
A key priority will be to ensure the longevity and effectiveness of our current suite of programs—both through the dissemination of findings from trials, research, and data analysis, and through the adaptation of the Centre to respond to future challenges.

ACSES will continue facilitating and conducting research on national priorities, partnering with institutions to build capacity in areas where research expertise is scarce, and working with stakeholders to identify and fill data gaps.

Our mission remains the same—to support evidence-based analysis, research, and evaluation across Australia's higher education sector, with the ultimate goal of improving access, retention, and success for underrepresented students.

> A trial team from Curtin University present at the inaugural Equity Frontiers Forum

Questions?



Our people

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*Curtin University –
Vice-Chancellor*



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ACSES Advisory Board –
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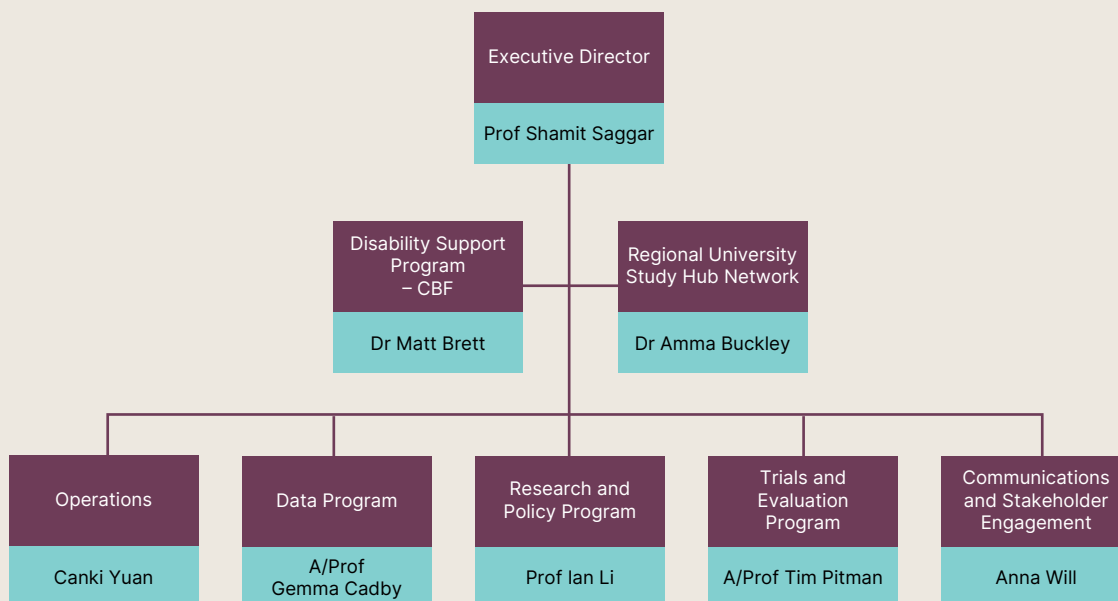
Communications Officer

Anne Whitehouse

Administrative Officer

As of December 2025

ACSES senior staff structure as of December 2025



Our publications

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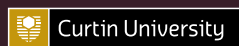
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Our events

In 2025, ACSES hosted the following events:

- > **5 February:** Capacity Building Grants information session
- > **13 February:** Small Grants webinar | Investigating the relationships between first-in-family status, equity groups, and university access
- > **11 March:** Fellowships Forum 2025
- > **12 March:** Fellowships Commencement Event 2025
- > **13 March:** Evidence for Action: Equity Frontiers Forum 2025
- > **14 March:** Equity Hub Community of Practice March 2025
- > **20 March:** Small Grants webinar | Financial challenges of students studying in Australian and New Zealand universities
- > **15 May:** ACSES Trials for Equity workshop, South Australia
- > **23 May:** Enabling access and engagement for all through Universal Design for Learning workshop with Visiting Scholar Sean Bracken
- > **18 June:** Practitioner Resource Grants information session
- > **25 June:** Quasi-Experimental Design Program information session
- > **8 September:** Equity Hub Community of Practice September 2025
- > **9–10 September:** Student Equity in an Era of Change 2025: The Australian Student Equity Symposium
- > **1 October:** Equity Hub: Training modules and Program Logic Model (PLM) Tool launch webinar
- > **28 October:** World Access to Higher Education Day webinar
- > **30 October:** Impact Evaluation for Equity workshop, Canberra
- > **11 November:** Research webinar: HDR Stipends Scheme
- > **24 November:** Equity Hub Community of Practice November 2025



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