

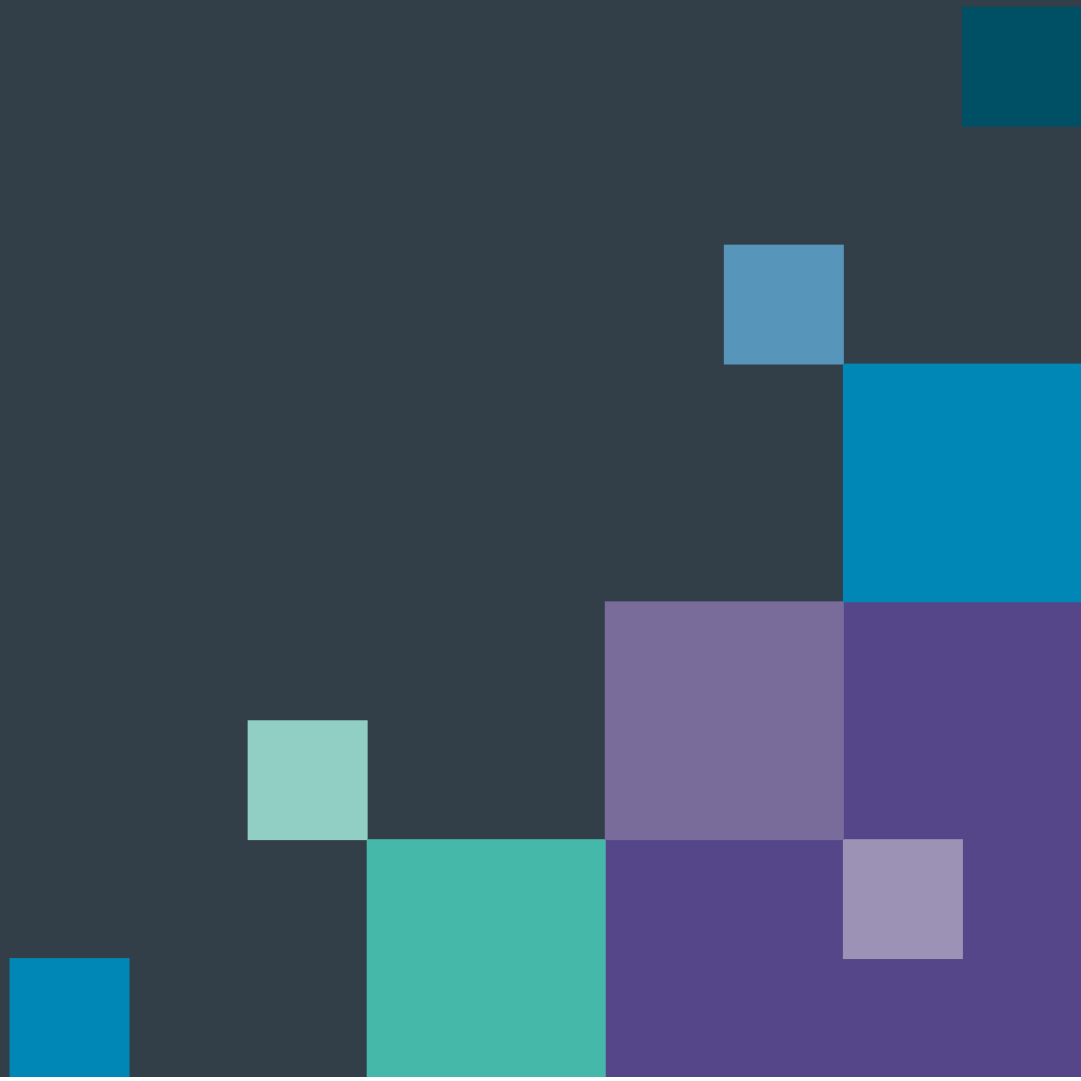
“AdvanceHE



Windows into practice

**Horizon Educators: Competitive Education-Focussed
Roles**

University of Sydney, Australia



Overview

The University of Sydney has made a significant commitment to enhancing the teaching and learning landscape through the Horizon Educator recruitment, representing Australia's most substantial investment in building a diverse community of education-focused (EF) academics. Through the Horizon Educators' recruitment, the University will advertise 220 EF roles over three years, 165 of which are advertised as an "open call" with a substantial national and international campaign. This initiative spans all academic levels and disciplines, with a targeted emphasis on recruiting EF academics at levels C to E to bolster education leadership and the advancement of EF roles through modelling and mentorship.

Central to this endeavour is the Academic Excellence Framework, a new recognition and reward structure at the University which is designed, in part, to elevate the profile and impact of educators and cultivate a robust teaching and learning culture.

The Academic Excellence Framework outlines several expectations for EF academics, including that they engage beyond their individual units, working at school and University level, and developing national, and potentially international profiles. These expectations are designed to promote EF involvement in dissemination, collaboration, and leadership in teaching. They are also designed to signal clearly to managers that EF academics should do more than "just more teaching", and that instead they can and should contribute to cultural transformation within the university. The ability to effectively evidence the impact of teaching has become integral to these structural revisions.

The competitive nature of EF roles at the University of Sydney marks a departure from the perception of the EF pathway as a fallback for academics who are not meeting research benchmarks. The shift in perspective is further solidified by the Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026, which increased the minimum allocation for research and scholarship in EF roles to 20% of the workload, doubling the previous standard. Consequently, the "teaching and teaching-related activities" load for EF academics has been reduced from 80% to 70%, enabling a greater balance between teaching, scholarship, and educational research. To support these research initiatives the University has launched the Education Focused Academics Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Grant program, for 2025. All EF academics in the University are invited to apply for \$5,000 and \$10,000 grants to support their SoTL.

The University has also built a normative workload expectations document for academics that gives examples of what "teaching related activities" might look like for education specialists (including EF academics). These activities include leadership, strategic, and quality assurance work such as running a Community of Practice, conducting professional development for other staff, and chairing a program review.

Institutional context

The University of Sydney, established in 1850, holds the distinction of being Australia's first university. Known for its research, academic rigor, and international collaborations, the university operates as a public entity, drawing funding from government sources and industry partnerships. The main campus, located in Camperdown and Darlington near Sydney's central business district, serves as a hub for a comprehensive offering of academic programs and research. Additional campuses across New South Wales support specialized studies and research in veterinary, medical, and agricultural sciences, among others. The University of Sydney is a key member of the Group of Eight (Go8), consistently excelling in research output and influence.

Recognition and Reward for Teaching and Learning Excellence

Pathways

The University of Sydney offers multiple promotion streams:

- Teaching and research
- Education-focused
- Research-focused
- For levels D and E, a governance, leadership, and engagement-focused track

This multi-pathway system ensures that diverse academic contributions are recognized and rewarded.

Structural Supports for Capacity Building

The University of Sydney has implemented several key structures to reinforce its commitment to education-focused roles:

- **Horizon Educators Recruitment:** This foundational program has supported the recruitment and development of EF academics, embedding a culture of teaching excellence.
- **Academic Excellence Framework:** This Framework has redefined the education-related expectations of all academics and clarified the standards of work expected from EF academics.
- **EF Academic SoTL Grants:** This program provides the opportunity for EF academics across the University to apply for grants of \$5,000 or \$10,000 to support their SoTL.

- **Normative Workload Document:** This document provides detailed examples of the types of work a specialist educator might do as part of the “teaching-related activities”.
- **The University of Sydney Enterprise Agreement (2023-2026):** The Enterprise Agreement has doubled the research workload allocation for EF academics from 10% to 20%, thus mandating the opportunity for EF academics to pursue meaningful programs of research.
- **Sydney Educational Fellowship Program:** The University supports staff to attain Advance HE Fellowship from Associate through to Principal Fellow.

Role of HEA Fellowships in Recognition

The University of Sydney holds accreditation from Advance HE for two distinguished programs:

1. Sydney Educational Fellowship Program
2. Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education)

These accreditations underscore the university’s commitment to maintaining high standards of teaching and learning, aligning with global best practices.

Reflections

The changes at the University of Sydney have yielded significant successes, including the recruitment of over 190 Horizon Educators (to date), clarification and broadening of career expectations for EF academics, and an increase in the mentorship and modelling available to current EF staff through the new hires.

Challenges to consider moving forward include embedding more EF academics in leadership positions, equipping EFs to effectively evaluate and demonstrate the impact of their work to promotion committees, and upskilling EF academics in SoTL so they can synergise their teaching and research if they wish to. Ensuring that Heads of School are proactive in supporting EF academics to balance their workload and document their teaching contributions is also a priority. Addressing these challenges may involve enhancing existing communities of practice (CoPs) and establishing additional CoPs to strengthen the culture of teaching recognition and reward.

Conclusion

The University of Sydney’s 2023 -2025 initiatives around EF academics exemplify the positive outcomes of structural change aimed at promoting teaching excellence. The institution’s commitment to strategic policy adjustments, competitive EF roles, and capacity-

building initiatives provides a replicable framework for other universities seeking to enhance education focused pathways. The successful integration of EF academics and the comprehensive support structures highlight the importance of aligning academic expectations, thus fostering an environment where teaching and research are equally valued.

Contact us

All enquiries

Email: communications@advance-he.ac.uk

Advance HE helps HE institutions be the best they can be, by unlocking the potential of their people.

We are a member-led, sector-owned charity that works with institutions and higher education across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. We are experts in higher education with a particular focus on enhancing teaching and learning, effective governance, leadership development and tackling inequalities through our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work.

Our strategic goals to enhance confidence and trust in HE, address inequalities, promote inclusion and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society, support the work of our members and the HE sector.

We deliver our support through professional development programmes and events, Fellowships, awards, student surveys and research, providing strategic change and consultancy services and through membership (including accreditation of teaching and learning, equality charters, knowledge and resources).

Advance HE is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 04931031. Company limited by guarantee registered in Ireland no. 703150. Registered as a charity in England and Wales no. 1101607. Registered as a charity in Scotland no. SC043946. Registered Office: Advance HE, Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York, YO10 5BR, United Kingdom.

© 2024 Advance HE. All rights reserved.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of Advance HE. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the copyright owner. Such permission will normally be granted for non-commercial, educational purposes provided that due acknowledgement is given. The Advance HE logo should not be used without our permission.

To request copies of this report in large print or in a different format, please contact the Marketing and Communications Team at Advance HE: communications@advance-he.ac.uk

advance-he.ac.uk

in X f @AdvanceHE