

“AdvanceHE

# + Windows into practice

Advancing culture through community building and capacity development

University of New South Wales, Australia



## Overview of successful strategies

The University of New South Wales (UNSW) has committed to enhancing the quality of learning and teaching as outlined in its 2015-2025 Strategic Plan. The university's objective is to provide an exceptional student experience through robust curricula, teaching, and learning infrastructure. This strategic aim is operationalized through the [Education Focused \(EF\)](#) initiative, which fosters a cultural shift underpinned by community building and capacity development.

Since 2018, UNSW has implemented a series of targeted capacity-building measures aimed at reinforcing community, fostering collaboration, and nurturing skill development. Senior leadership has played a crucial role in facilitating, maintaining, and expanding these initiatives, promoting shared practices and supporting the successful establishment of the EF program. The cornerstone of this success is the development of vibrant [EF communities of practice](#) that includes academics from UNSW as well as other institutions both within Australia and globally. This inclusive network promotes the exchange of best practices, thereby broadening impact, enriching perspectives, and bolstering confidence among educators. The EF program's grant system has been instrumental in funding conference attendance and research in the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning \(SoTL\)](#), complemented by mentorship on writing abstracts and fostering collaboration at professional gatherings.

Programs such as "Lunch and Learn" forums enable cross-disciplinary interaction and the exchange of effective teaching methodologies. These forums provide EF academics with opportunities to demonstrate their excellence for promotion. For example, a forum on assessment design that engaged 55 participants from five different faculties illustrates the educator's cross-disciplinary influence. Additionally, mentoring initiatives have assisted educators in articulating their teaching dissemination for promotion discussions, as well as their language skills when applying for teaching grants and conferences. Collectively, these initiatives empower educators at UNSW to build expertise, share knowledge, and participate in broader academic dialogues that drive teaching excellence.

## Institutional context

Established in 1949, UNSW is a premier public research university located in Sydney, Australia. It is a member of the Group of Eight (Go8), a coalition of leading Australian universities known for their strong research output and international partnerships. UNSW provides a comprehensive range of undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs across various disciplines, including Arts Design & Architecture, Business, Engineering, Law and Justice, Medicine and Health, and Science.

## Recognition and Reward Framework for Teaching and Learning

### Policies

UNSW has revised its academic promotion policies to support Education Focused (EF) academics, allowing for:

- + Promotion based on significant achievements in any of the three academic pillars: Education, Research, and Collegiality, Engagement and Leadership . This framework enables EF academics to qualify for promotion without a conventional research profile.
- + Inclusion of pedagogical research outputs as part of the research assessment pillar.
- + Recognition of contributions to educational leadership and improvements in the teaching and learning environment within the Collegiality, Engagement and Leadership pillar.

### Processes

All academics at UNSW engage with a unified expectations framework, which ensures equitable recognition across roles. EF academics, who dedicate approximately 80% of their time to teaching and education related activities, benefit from structured support that fosters their development and acknowledges their contributions. Initially, where possible, a senior EF staff representative was included on promotion committees to help traditional Teaching & Research (T&R) and Research-Focused (RF) academics understand the nuances of demonstrating educational impact. This insight has now been institutionalized across UNSW.

### Structural supports for community and capacity building

UNSW has established various structures to promote the EF agenda, such as:

- + **EF Communities of Practice:** These groups participate in decision-making processes, providing consultation on vital educational matters including assessment, academic integrity, equity, diversity, and student wellbeing. This initiative has drawn international attention for its impactful approach.
- + **myEducation Portfolio:** This digital repository allows staff to document and showcase their achievements, promoting good practice, career advancement, teaching recognition, and awards. It includes student feedback and peer reviews as core components.
- + **Academic Expectations Framework:** This framework aligns EF academic roles with defined development goals, promoting teaching excellence through clear expectations at each career level.
- + **EF Grants Program:** This competitive funding scheme supports individual and collective EF academics' development, facilitating conference participation, continuous professional development courses, career coaching, and collaborative research.

### **Fellowships as part of recognition**

UNSW offers dual pathways for obtaining Advance HE Fellowships, including AFHEA through the accredited Foundations of University Learning and Teaching (FULT) program, open to all academics and professional staff.

### **Reflections and sustainability considerations**

UNSW's comprehensive approach has successfully fostered a culture that values teaching and learning through structured recognition and community-driven capacity building. This alignment has created consistency in the language and priorities of teaching and learning throughout the institution, fostering collaborations that extend beyond UNSW to other universities.

To sustain this progress, continued investment in resources such as EF grants and time allocation for educators engaged in educational activities and SoTL is essential. Additional funding opportunities, both internal and external (e.g., HERDSA grants), would bolster the institution's efforts to sustain this momentum.

### **Challenges and future directions**

Maintaining this cultural shift will require ongoing commitment from leadership to provide sufficient time and resources for EF academics, who manage substantial teaching responsibilities. Addressing these challenges involves continued financial support for professional development and ensuring that educators can meaningfully engage in educational research and activities.

### **Conclusion and broader implications**

The UNSW case exemplifies the power of strategic, community-centric initiatives to drive cultural change in higher education. The EF program's success, underpinned by strong leadership, mentorship, and structured support, offers a blueprint for other institutions aiming to prioritize and reward teaching excellence. This model underscores the importance of shared practice and sustained investment in building academic capacity and community.

# Contact us

## All enquiries

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