



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Part of the Sydney in
2032
Strategy



The University of Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning

Strategic Plan 2025–26

Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Sydney's campuses and facilities sit on the ancestral lands of many of Australia's First Peoples, who have for thousands of generations exchanged knowledge for the benefit of all. These include the Gadigal, Gamaraygal, Dharug, Wangal, Tharawal, Deerabbin, Darkinyung, Guringgai, Gamilaraay, Barkindji, Bundjalung, Wiradjuri, Wiljali, Ngunawal, Gureng Gureng and Gagudju peoples.

Respectfully acknowledging the ancient learning cultures and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the University of Sydney declares its commitment to the continuation of this sharing through the agency of our work. There is no part of Australia where we work that has not been loved, nourished and cared for since the beginning of time.



Botanical elements in the foreground complement Dale Harding's *Spine 3 (radiance)*, 2018; Carslaw Building, Camperdown Campus

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Leadership foreword

I am pleased to pen this foreword to the School of Architecture, Design and Planning's contribution to the University's *Sydney in 2032 Strategy*. Our academic and professional staff have jointly developed this plan, and this ethos of teamwork will be crucial for the school's ongoing growth and success.

This strategic plan makes some direct commitments to raising excellence in education and research in 2025–26, but also outlines a far-reaching set of interventions that will be key to the school's civic standing, particularly in sustainability, equity, diversity and inclusion, and cultural competence. The initiatives described in the following pages range from mentoring schemes to improved educational assessments, from embedding sustainability in our curriculum to sharing stories about our research and teaching more often – and more effectively.

This is also a moment when we can take huge steps forward in advancing First Nations knowledge of how land, design and building are intertwined and embodied in ways of being. This strategic plan includes clear initiatives to decolonise our curriculum and to provide a hub for First Nations research. It also provides us with a renewed opportunity to yarn with our people and our partners about how the University's Walanga Wingara Mura Design Principles can help us to rethink our work and education spaces as part of broader efforts across campus to weave Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, worldviews and practices into the very fabric of our University.

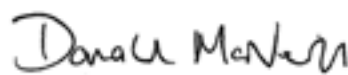


This plan also sets out some bold steps to enhance our ability to research with impact, including launching the Sydney Design Accelerator, which will draw on successful models of rapid innovation to address pressing issues. Our newly appointed Horizon Fellows will build on our research excellence in indoor environmental quality, using evidence-based analysis to mitigate the impacts of heat, air pollution, and mould on buildings and cities. Major university and philanthropic investments into architectural history and practice, and cities research, will allow us to undertake thorough research and framing of key intellectual challenges across our disciplines.

We have bold ambitions. Our academic staff – the majority of whom were born and/or trained outside Australia – give the school a cosmopolitan worldview as well as wide-ranging connections with leading design and built-environment schools worldwide.

Our strategic plan for 2025–26 has been thoughtfully prepared and discussed by many people within the school, guided by the University’s Strategic Planning Office. All of this input is much valued; the key going forward will be the enthusiasm with which we turn our objectives into specific actions that we can implement over the next two years.

This will be an exciting process, and one not without its challenges, but I have full confidence that our people have the motivation and the capability to achieve it.



Professor Donald McNeill
Interim Dean, School of Architecture, Design and Planning



Sydney in
2032
Strategy

OUR ASPIRATIONS

Building on the First Nations knowledge of these lands,
we are Australia's first university, Sydney's university
and a great global university

Our student-focused
education is
transformational

ADP 2025–26 initiatives

- Improve the experience of our students
- Establish the school as a provider of lifelong learning
 - Embed Indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews to inform our learning culture
- Embed sustainability into our curricula



Our community
thrives through
diversity

ADP 2025–26 initiatives

- Develop access and outreach activities for students
 - Implement our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategy



Our research is excellent,
tackles the greatest
challenges and contributes
to the common good

ADP 2025–26 initiatives

- Strengthen and promote our research excellence
 - Build a research ecosystem to accelerate our research impact



A better place to work, and a place that works better

ADP 2025–26 initiatives

- Invest in infrastructure and sustainable operations for excellence
- Facilitate active engagement, dialogue and scaffolding for our staff
 - Prioritise and strengthen our partnerships

Our aspirations for 2032:

The role of the University of Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning

In 2032, the School of Architecture, Design and Planning (ADP) is renowned for the unique way in which our core disciplines of architecture, design and urbanism contribute equally to a sustainable future for Sydney, Australia and the world, which straddles the physical and the digital.

Drawing on our broader expertise across the humanities, sciences and social sciences, we support experimentation and risk taking and encourage our teams to address the complex challenges confronting the world. We explore how regions, cities, buildings, interiors, products, digital technologies and systems can successfully meet the needs of people, society and the planet.

In 2032, our research is admired globally for its contribution to community-led solutions to significant urban, technological, environmental and societal issues, and for its role in informing ethical policy and practice. We have incorporated design thinking into collaborations across our disciplines and are recognised as a global centre of design excellence. Through these collaborations we enable innovations in theory, policy, technology and design, balancing the creation and critique of technologies and the omnipresent digitisation of our world.

We continually nurture a strong and diverse set of industry and community partnerships, through which we embrace inclusive and sustainable co-design approaches to translate research and design into practice, including our teaching practice. In 2032, our students benefit from these deeper and more enduring connections with industry and community. Our students, graduates and employers also benefit from the work we have done to deliver a transformational education across the school, having evolved our existing programs to meet the evolving needs of society, and played a leading role in the University's ambitions to develop popular lifelong learning opportunities.

During their time with us, our students become intellectually and emotionally well rounded, and model the qualities of integrity and creativity. They develop skills that empower them to design just structures and habitats, as well as systems, services and societies that are equitable, resilient and harmonious. They learn about local and Indigenous knowledges, giving them a foundation for a uniquely global perspective.

Our research, teaching and external engagement activities are all strengthened by diverse voices and perspectives. People from all backgrounds feel welcome and supported, and we learn from each other as a community. Our students and staff feel respected and valued, and are supported with the resources and environment that enable them to thrive. We continue to learn from Indigenous knowledge systems and have incorporated this wisdom into our sustainable ways of working.

In 2032, this approach to research, education and collaboration is physically reflected in our home – the Wilkinson Building. More than 100 years ago, in the 1920s, the University's inaugural professor of architecture, Leslie Wilkinson, led the development of what is now the Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning. More than a century later, these core disciplines have jointly contributed to our work throughout the 2020s to renovate the Wilkinson Building as a physical manifestation of our commitment to sustainability and social impact, reinvigorating it as a place for our people to teach, learn and research in collaboration with our alumni and partners.



Workshop 2023, an exhibition by Master of Architecture graduates at the Tin Sheds Gallery, 2023



Our student-focused education is *transformational*

In 2025–26 we will partner with our students to continually improve their educational experience and sense of belonging. We will expand our lifelong learning opportunities and enhance our curricula by embedding Indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews, and sustainability principles.

ADP 2025–26 initiatives

Improve the experience of our students

Committed to placing students at the heart of our efforts, in 2025–26 we will deliver several actions to realise sustained improvements in student satisfaction. As a matter of priority, we will:

- in alignment with the University’s refreshed Teaching and Learning Strategy, embed a school assessment framework to ensure a coherent, fair and equitable approach to assessments
- foster a supportive and conducive learning environment that prioritises engaging with our students and listening to their feedback, as well as investing in the professional development of our educators
- partner with our student societies to define a student-led vision and initiatives to facilitate positive change within the school community and improve our students’ sense of belonging
- support student–staff collaboration to enhance distinct elements of student engagement.

Establish the school as a provider of lifelong learning

In 2025–26 we will draw on our existing expertise in providing continuing professional development modules to practising architects to amplify our contribution to the University’s goal to be an in-demand provider of dynamic lifelong learning. By partnering with industry experts to offer impactful hybrid learning opportunities, we will help organisations and communities to respond to the complex challenges they face.

We will start by developing and delivering programs from our Design discipline, which has been a leader in design and design research for more than 40 years. Our recently launched micro-credential Leading Design Teams will be the launchpad for a suite of design-led training programs and micro-credentials that empower individuals, organisations and communities to enhance their design skills and capacity, foster innovation, and provide problem-solving capabilities to address complex challenges.

We will learn from these offerings so that we will be able to expand our lifelong learning contributions in the future.



Graduate Exhibition Design Project, 2023

Embed Indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews to inform our learning culture

We understand that students of architecture, design and urbanism are future change makers who will drive and facilitate practices that care and design for the health and wellbeing of Country and of First Nations communities and cultural practices. Elevating the cultural competence of our staff and students is critical to ensuring we deliver enhanced learning experiences that enable our graduates to fulfil this role of change maker as responsibly and effectively as possible.

In 2025–26 we will strengthen our capabilities by listening to and connecting with Indigenous cultural practices and knowledge systems across the school. We will Indigenise our curricula and commit to implementing innovative education programs that support all staff as we embark on this journey together.

Truth telling and deeper understandings of Country and of First Nations communities and cultural practices will be core to this work as we continue to weave Indigenous knowledges and perspectives throughout our curricula. Program directors will be asked to ensure that our students graduate with exposure to a diversity of knowledge systems, methodologies and representations that will allow them to better engage with Country and with First Nations communities and cultural practices.

Embed sustainability into our curricula

In 2025–26 we will contribute to the University's ambition to visibly centre sustainability, including motivating and equipping our graduates to embrace social responsibility. We want our graduates to think critically, to collaborate productively and, recognising themselves as custodians of the future, to positively influence the world.

To enable this, we will pilot a framework to map our curricula to sustainability principles and scale these principles across our programs as a matter of priority across future program reviews. Leveraging our new Master of Building Performance and Sustainable Design, we will help to shape the next generation of professionals working at the cutting edge of sustainability in the built environment, promoting a culture of change across the school and in the industry.

We will also help our students to realise their sustainability aspirations by supporting student-led sustainability initiatives and providing on-campus sustainability projects, and our Educators' Community of Practice will be a forum to share sustainability knowledge, experiences and success stories, and provide tailored support to unit of study coordinators.

Our community thrives *through diversity*

In 2025–26 we will continue our commitment to supporting all members of our diverse staff and student community with the resources and environment they need to thrive.

ADP 2025–26 initiatives

Develop access and outreach activities for students

In 2023–24 we welcomed 62 students from under-represented low-socioeconomic-status backgrounds, supported by the University's MySydney scholarship scheme. In 2025–26 we will continue to support these students while also welcoming and supporting new cohorts to succeed in their studies and beyond.

Part of our commitment to supporting our students is ensuring they have opportunities to connect and build friendships. We will develop a series of Design Jam challenges to enable interdisciplinary collaboration among students and more informal engagement with academic staff. We will also reduce or remove the costs of production and access to services such as 3D printing, prototyping and laser cutting in our degrees for students from under-represented backgrounds.

Looking beyond our current student cohorts, we will create new outreach activities for secondary school students, inviting them to spend time on campus engaging with the expertise of our staff and students, thereby laying the foundations for these students to consider coming to join us.

Implement our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategy

As a school, we thrive on diversity as a means of bringing together a wide range of perspectives, ways of knowing and practising into our academic community and work. In 2025–26 our recently formed Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee will drive actions to inform our practices and ensure that all members of our community feel valued.

We will begin by gathering data to better understand our existing diversity and identify where we are under-represented across various coordinates of diversity, in order to inform future conversations about where and how we can build greater diversity in our school. We will then leverage services and networks from across the University to build new capacity within the school to operationalise and expand support for all staff with diverse identities.

We will support equity of opportunity for career progression, with consideration for the diverse needs of academic and professional staff. We will plant seeds of belonging at each career stage to provide opportunities for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and collegial peer support. Our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee will support the collection of feedback on onboarding processes for staff, elevating staff belonging through sharing our unique stories.

To support our staff with caring responsibilities, we will promote and provide insights into University support programs and schemes for carers, raising greater awareness about flexible working best practice.



Students on Camperdown Campus

Our research is excellent, tackles the greatest challenges and *contributes to the common good*

In 2025–26 we will support and invest in research with the strongest potential to deliver excellence, and ensure that our research findings impact a broad and diverse audience. We will also establish school-wide research centres to focus our knowledge on matters critical to society.

ADP 2025–26 initiatives

Strengthen and promote our research excellence

In 2025–26 we will build strong foundations to support the school's contribution to the University's research aspirations, building on our shared commitment to pursuing scholarly research that is excellent in comparison to our peer institutions.

Those foundations will include new future-focused research centres based on our deep disciplinary expertise in architecture, design and urbanism that will investigate and offer solutions to complex challenges. We also commit to supporting Indigenous research and to working with, and for, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues by creating a First Nations Indigenous Research Hub.

We will implement a school-wide, structured and consistent approach to research mentoring, and will strengthen our reputation for research excellence and impact by actively publicising our research findings across diverse communication channels to reach a broad and diverse audience.

Build a research ecosystem to accelerate our research impact

In 2025–26 we will draw on 40 years of leading design innovation to establish the Sydney Design Accelerator, which will collaboratively advance design approaches, knowledge and innovation to address the complex and multifaceted paradoxes facing the world today. The accelerator will have an amplifying effect on our work across the school to creatively enable, support and integrate responsible design research and practice across such areas as society, technology and industry.

We will further develop key partnerships to increase the impacts of our innovative work, which will be valued internationally for its sustainability, integration with all aspects of architecture, design, urbanism, place making and contribution to our communities. These partnerships will be built across the University to enable mission-driven research projects, as well as strategic partnering across the sector.



Robotics research at the Design, Modelling and Fabrication (DMaF) Lab, Darlington Campus

A better place to work, *and a place that works better*

Our supportive, inclusive and thriving culture, our strong partnerships, and our investments in infrastructure and sustainable operations will be key enablers of our aspirations in education and research in 2025–26.

ADP 2025–26 initiatives

Invest in infrastructure and sustainable operations for excellence

In 2025–26 we will advocate for an adaptive reuse transformation of the Wilkinson Building to provide the University with an important opportunity to demonstrate leadership in sustainable design and in the application of the Walanga Wingara Mura Design Principles, and to make an investment in high-quality spaces that support and reflect the world-class nature of the research conducted, and learning experiences created, by members of our school.

By choosing to transform the Wilkinson Building, the University would be preserving the architecturally significant history of the school while reinvigorating it for the next generation of teaching and learning through international best practice in architectural design.

At the same time the project would progress the University's commitment to sustainability, with the Wilkinson Building becoming a living lab enabling collaboration among staff, students, industry partners and the broader community. Novel research prospects would become possible as this work unfolds, providing opportunities to engage students and researchers across the University.

The reimagined Wilkinson Building would facilitate a transformational education for our students, a better place to work for our staff, and an uplift in research excellence for our academics across design and health, data and the built environment, and zero carbon and the circular economy.

As a more immediate demonstration of our deep commitment to sustainability throughout our operations, governance and leadership, in 2025–26 we will develop an environmental, social and governance framework along with evidence-based, sustainable operational initiatives. We will track our adverse environmental and social impacts, and engage with our staff, students and partners to accelerate our efforts to reduce them.



Wilkinson Building, Darlington Campus

Facilitate active engagement, dialogue and scaffolding for our staff

Our consultations with staff have identified a shared ambition to foster a supportive, inclusive and thriving culture within our school, where every member feels valued, supported and empowered to contribute to our collective success.

To facilitate this, in 2025–26 we will create more opportunities for colleagues to come together in new networks that span disciplines, career stages, and academic and professional staff. These will include informal monthly gatherings, and events that celebrate significant cultural occasions and personal milestones. We will create space at our all-staff retreats for focused team building and collaborative problem solving.

We will also leverage other formal initiatives both within the University and within the school (for example, our participation in the development of the University’s Academic Excellence Framework, our focus on reinvigorating the Wilkinson Building, and our strengthening of our communities of practice, as described elsewhere in this strategic plan), as opportunities to foster productive conversations across disciplinary and other boundaries. We will consolidate and build on mentorship programs to support junior colleagues, and nurture knowledge sharing and support across areas and disciplines.

Finally, we will review and optimise our communication channels to ensure they are effective, transparent and accessible. We will encourage executive and committee representatives to regularly share updates and decisions through school, discipline and local meetings.

Prioritise and strengthen our partnerships

We will build on our numerous successes in University partnership programs to further enhance our educational collaborations and deepen the impacts of our research partnerships.

In 2025–26 we will identify priority regions and institutions that share our goals of fostering global citizenship, to help us diversify our cohort and improve our student and staff experience. We will also identify partners within government, industry and the broader community who share our aspiration to have more positive impacts on local communities through partnerships that address real-world challenges and needs.

A holistic collaboration framework and a set of agreed principles for partnering will enable this work. In addition, our newly created academic leadership positions in research communications and partnerships will raise the profile and reputation of the school on a local and global scale through our storytellers – the people in our school who clearly and passionately articulate our vision, as well as the research and education work of their colleagues across disciplines.



Strategic Planning Workshop, 2024

How this strategic plan was developed

We developed the Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning Strategic Plan 2025–26 through a highly collaborative and consultative process. During 2024, our colleagues and stakeholders had multiple opportunities to provide feedback and contribute ideas that directly informed this plan, as summarised below.

Broad staff engagement

We began our strategic planning process with an all-staff strategy day in February 2024, at which staff reflected on our current state and generated ideas for a preliminary vision for the school in 2032.

We also invited staff to provide feedback on draft content throughout the process, by means of surveys and posters displayed in the staff hub.

Senior leader workshops

The school's senior academic and professional staff leaders came together for a series of workshops in 2024 to refine the outputs from our broad staff engagement into this strategic plan.

This group further developed our vision for the school in 2032, identified potential barriers to achieving this vision, and developed initiatives for 2025–26 that would help us to build a strong foundation from which to achieve it.

Discipline and professional staff representatives

A broader cross-section of staff representing each discipline and each of the professional functions came together for a workshop to provide feedback on a revised vision.

Student engagement

Our students were invited to provide feedback on the education-related initiatives by means of a survey. Their insights rounded out the collaborative development of this strategic plan, reinforcing our commitment to partner with our students to continually improve their educational experience and sense of belonging.

Contact us

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